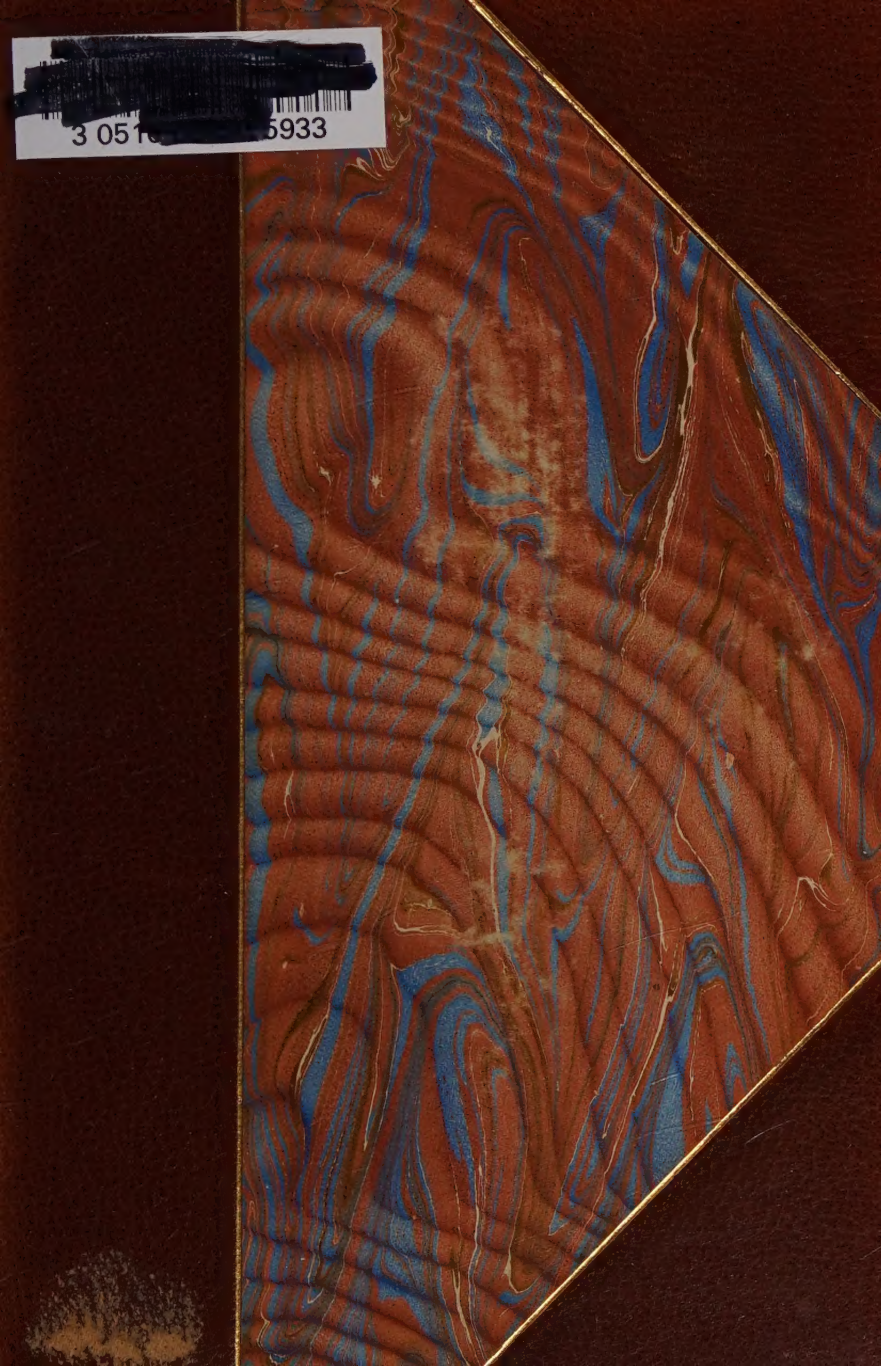
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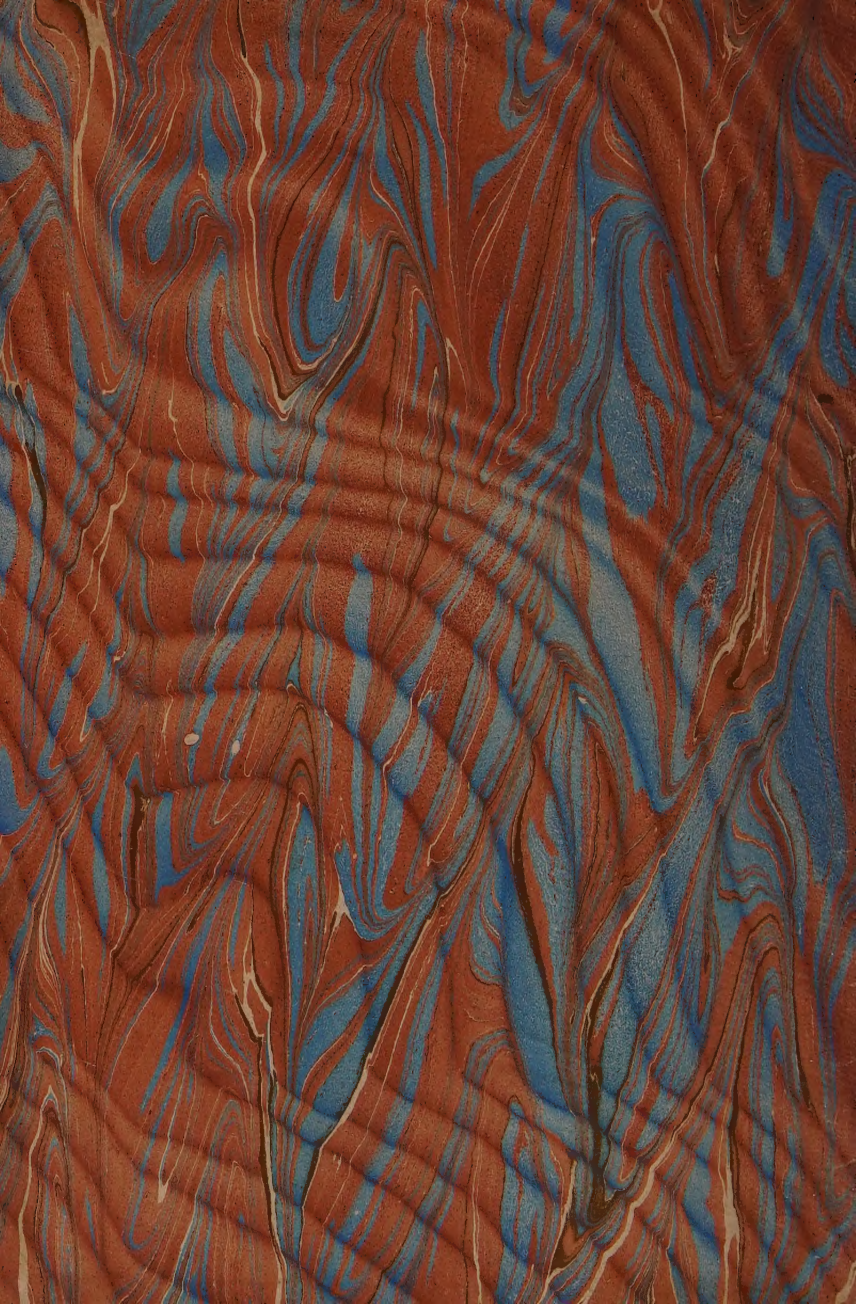

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Shelburne Essays

By

Paul Elmer More

Third Series

Τίνι χρὴ κρίνεσθαι τὰ μέλλοντα καλῶς κριθήσεσθαι; ἆρ' οὐκ ἐμπειρίᾳ τε καὶ φρονήσει καὶ λόγῳ;

PLATO, *Republic.*

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1907

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PAUL ELMER MORE

Published, September, 1905
Reprinted, January, 1906; December, 1906

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

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The last essay in this volume, though written several years ago, has never before been printed. For permission to reprint the other essays thanks are due to the publishers of the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Independent*, and the New York *Evening Post*.

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SHELBURNE ESSAYS

THIRD SERIES

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF WILLIAM COWPER

If, as I sometimes think, a man's interest in letters is almost the surest measure of his love for Letters in the larger sense of the word, the busy schoolmaster of Olney ought to stand high in favour for the labour he has bestowed on completing and rearranging the *Correspondence of William Cowper*.[1] It may be that Mr. Wright's competence as an editor still leaves something to be desired. Certainly, if I may speak for my own taste, he has in one respect failed to profit by a golden opportunity; it needed only to print the more intimate poems of Cowper in their proper place among the letters to have

[1] *The Correspondence of William Cowper.* Arranged in chronological order, with annotations, by Thomas Wright, Principal of Cowper School, Olney. Four volumes. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1904.

produced a work doubly interesting and perfectly unique. The correspondence itself would have been shot through by a new light, and the poetry might have been restored once more to its rightful seat in our affections. The fact is that not many readers to-day can approach the verse of the eighteenth century in a mood to enjoy or even to understand it. We have grown so accustomed to over-emphasis in style and wasteful effusion in sentiment that the clarity and self-restraint of that age repel us as ungenuine; we are warned by a certain *frigus* at the heart to seek our comfort elsewhere. And just here was the chance for an enlightened editor. So much of Cowper's poetry is the record of his own simple life and of the little adventures that befell him in the valley of the Ouse, that it would have lost its seeming artificiality and would have gained a fresh appeal by association with the letters that relate the same events and emotions. How, for example, the quiet grace of the fables (and good fables are so rare in English!) would be brought back to us again if we could read them side by side with the actual stories out of which they grew. There is a whole charming natural history here of beast and bird and insect and flower. The nightingale which Cowper heard on New Year's Day sings in a letter as well as in the poem; and here, to name no others, are the incidents of the serpent and the kittens, and of that walk by the Ouse when the poet's dog Beau brought him the water lily. Or,

to turn to more serious things, how much the pathetic stanzas *To Mary* would gain in poignant realism if we came upon them immediately after reading the letters in which Cowper lays bare his remorse for the strain his malady had imposed upon her.

A still more striking example would be the lines written *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture.* By a literary tradition these are reckoned among the most perfect examples of pathos in the language, and yet how often to-day are they read with any deep emotion? I suspect no tears have fallen on that page for many a long year.

Oh that those lips had language! Life has passed
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.
Those lips are thine—thy own sweet smile I see,
The same that oft in childhood solaced me;
Voice only fails, else how distinct they say,
"Grieve not, my child, chase all thy fears away!"

. . . . . .

Short-lived possession! but the record fair,
That memory keeps of all thy kindness there,
Still outlives many a storm that has effaced
A thousand other themes less deeply traced.
Thy nightly visits to my chamber made,
That thou mightst know me safe and warmly laid;
Thy morning bounties as I left my home,
The biscuit or confectionary plum:
The fragrant waters on my cheeks bestowed
By thy own hand, till fresh they shone and glowed:
All this, and more enduring still than all,
Thy constant flow of love, that knew no fall,—

do you not feel the expression here, the very balance of the rhymes, to stand like a barrier between the poet's emotion and your own susceptibility? And that *confectionary plum*—somehow the savour of it has long ago evaporated. Even the closing lines—

> Me howling blasts drive devious, tempest-tost,
> Sails ripped, seams opening wide, and compass lost—

need some allowance to cover their artificial mode. And it is just this allowance that association with the letters would afford; the mind would pass without a shock from the simple recital in prose of Cowper's ruined days to these phrases at once so metaphorical and so conventional, and would find in them a new power to move the heart. Or compare with the sentiment of the poem this paragraph from the letter to his cousin, Mrs. Bodham—all of it a model of simple beauty:

> The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me, as the picture you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt, had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I completed my sixth year; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from

her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression.

To read together the whole of this letter and of the poem is something more than a demonstration of what might be accomplished by a skilful editor; it is a lesson, too, in that quality of restrained dignity, I had almost said of self-respect, which we find it so difficult to impress on our broken modern style.

Some day, no doubt, we shall have such an interwoven edition of Cowper's prose and verse, to obtain which we would willingly sacrifice a full third of the letters if this were necessary. Meanwhile, let us be thankful for whatever fresh light our Olney editor has thrown on the correspondence, and take the occasion to look a little more closely into one of the strangest and most tragic of literary lives. William Cowper was born at Great Berkhampstead in 1731. His father, who was rector of the parish, belonged to a family of high connections, and his mother, Anne Donne, was also of noble lineage, claiming descent through four different lines from Henry III. The fact is of some importance, for the son was very much the traditional gentleman, and showed the pride of race both in his language and manners. He himself affected to think more of his kinship to John Donne, of poetical memory, than of his other forefathers, and, half in play, traced the irritability of his temper and his verse-mongering back to that "venerable ancestor, the Dean of St.

Paul's." [1] It is fanciful, but one is tempted to lay upon the old poet's meddling with coffins and ghastly thoughts some of the responsibility for the younger man's nightly terrors. "That which we call life is but *Hebdomada mortium*, a week of death, seven days, seven periods of life spent in dying," preached Donne in his last sermon, and an awful echo of the words might seem to have troubled his descendant's nerves. But that is not yet. As a boy and young man Cowper appears to have been high-spirited and natural. At Westminster School he passed under the instruction of Vincent Bourne, so many of whose fables he was to translate in after years, and who, with Milton and Prior, was most influential in forming his poetical manner.

I love the memory of Vinny Bourne [he wrote in one of his letters]. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in his way, except Ovid. . . . He was so good-natured, and so indolent, that I lost more than I got by him; for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for everything that could disgust you in his person. . . . I remember seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks and box his ears to put it out again.

After leaving Westminster he spent a few months at Berkhampstead, and then came to Lon-

[1] In a newly published volume of the letters of William Bodham Donne (the friend of Edward FitzGerald and Bernard Barton), the editor, Catharine B. Johnson, throws doubt on this supposed descent of Cowper's mother from the Poet Dean.

don under the pretext of studying law, living first with an attorney in Southampton Row and afterwards taking chambers in the Middle Temple. Life went merrily for a while. He was a fellow student with Thurlow, and there he was, he "and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed from morning to night in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law. Oh, fie, cousin!" he adds, "how could you do so?" This pretty "Oh fie!" introduces us to one who was to be his best and dearest correspondent, his cousin Harriet Cowper, afterwards Lady Hesketh, and who was to befriend him and cheer him in a thousand ways. It may introduce us also to Harriet's sister, Theodora, with whom Cowper, after the fashion of idle students, fell thoughtlessly in love. He would have married her, too, bringing an incalculable element into his writing which I do not like to contemplate; for it is the way of poets to describe most ideally what fortune has denied them in reality, and Cowper's task, we know, was to portray in prose and verse the quiet charms of the family. But the lady's father, for reasons very common in such cases, put an end to that danger. Cowper took the separation easily enough, if we may judge from the letters of the period; but to Theodora, one fancies, it meant a life of sad memories. They never exchanged letters, but in after years, when Lady Hesketh renewed correspondence with Cowper and brought him into connection with his kinsfolk, Theodora,

as "Anonymous," sent money and other gifts to eke out his slender living. It is generally assumed that the recipient never guessed the name of his retiring benefactress, but I prefer to regard it rather as a part of his delicacy and taste to affect ignorance where the donor did not wish to be revealed, and think that his penetration of the secret added a kind of wistful regret to his gratitude. "On Friday I received a letter from dear Anonymous," he writes to Lady Hesketh, "apprising me of a parcel that the coach would bring me on Saturday. Who is there in the world that has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be, so sacred to me, that if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery." Could there be a more tactful way of conveying his thanks and insinuating his knowledge while respecting Theodora's reserve?

But all this was to come after the great change in Cowper's life. As with Charles Lamb, a name one likes to link with his, the terrible shádow of madness fell upon him one day, never wholly to rise. The story of that calamity is too well known to need retelling in detail. A first stroke seized him in his London days, but seems not to have been serious. He recovered, and took up again

the easy life that was in retrospect to appear to him so criminally careless. In order to establish him in the world, his cousin, Major Cowper, offered him the office of Clerk of the Journals to the House of Lords. There was, however, some dispute as to the validity of the donor's powers, and it became necessary for Cowper to prove his competency at the bar of the House. The result was pitiable. Anxiety and nervous dread completely prostrated him. After trying futilely to take his own life, he was placed by his family in a private asylum at St. Albans, where he remained about a year and a half. His recovery took the form of religious conversion and a rapturous belief in his eternal salvation. Instead of returning to London, he went to live in the town of Huntingdon, drawn thither both by the retirement of the place and its nearness to Cambridge, where his brother John resided. Here he became acquainted with the Unwins:

. . . the most agreeable people imaginable; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as Parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which

suits me exactly; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts.

The intimacy ripened and Cowper was taken into the family almost as one of its members. But trouble and change soon broke into this idyllic home. Mr. Unwin was thrown from his horse and killed; the son was called away to a charge; the daughter married. Meanwhile, Mrs. Unwin and Cowper had gone to live at Olney, a dull town on the Ouse, where they might enjoy the evangelical preaching of that reformed sea-captain and slave-dealer, the Rev. John Newton.

The letters of this period are filled with a tremulous joy; it was as if one of the timid animals he loved so well had found concealment in the rocks and heard the baying of the hounds, thrown from the scent and far off. "For my own part," he writes to Lady Hesketh, "who am but as a Thames wherry, in a world full of tempest and commotion, I know so well the value of the creek I have put into, and the snugness it affords me, that I have a sensible sympathy with you in the pleasure you find in being once more blown to Droxford." Books he has in abundance, and happy country walks; friends that are more than friends to occupy his heart, and quaint characters to engage his wit. He finds an image of his days in Rousseau's description of an English morning, and his evenings differ from them in nothing except that they are still more snug and quieter. His talk is of the mercies and deliverance of God;

he is eager to convert the little world of his correspondents to his own exultant peace; and, it must be confessed, only the charm and breeding of his language save a number of these letters from the wearisomeness of misplaced preaching.

Cowper removed with Mrs. Unwin to Olney in 1767. Six years later came the miraculous event which changed the whole tenor of his life and which gave the unique character to all the letters he was to write thereafter. He was seized one night with a frantic despondency, and again for a year and a half, during all which time Mr. Newton cared for him as for a brother, suffered acute melancholia. He recovered his sanity in ordinary matters, but the spring of joy and peace had been dried up within him. Thenceforth he never, save for brief intervals, could shake off the conviction that he had been abandoned by God—rather that for some inscrutable reason God had deliberately singled him out as a victim of omnipotent wrath and eternal damnation. No doubt there was some physical origin, some lesion of the nerves, at the bottom of this disease, but the peculiar form of his mania and its virulence can be traced to causes quite within the range of literary explanation. He was a scapegoat of his age; he accepted with perfect faith what other men talked about, and it darkened his reason. Those were the days when a sharp and unwholesome opposition had arisen between the compromise of the Church with worldly forms and the

evangelical absolutism of Wesley and Whitefield and John Newton. Cowper himself, on emerging from his melancholia at St. Albans, had adopted the extreme Calvinistic tenets in regard to the divine omnipotence. Man was but a toy in the hands of an arbitrary Providence; conversion was first a recognition of the utter nullity of the human will; and there was no true religion, no salvation, until Grace had descended freely like a fire from heaven and devoured this offering of a man's soul. To understand Cowper's faith one should read his letter of March 31, 1770, in which he relates the death-bed conversion of his brother at Cambridge. Now John was a clergyman in good standing, a man apparently of blameless life and Christian faith, yet to himself and to William he was without hope until the miracle of regeneration had been wrought upon him. After reading Cowper's letter one should turn to Jonathan Edwards's treatise on *The Freedom of the Will*, and follow the inexorable logic by which the New England divine proves that God must be the source of all good and evil, of this man's salvation and that man's loss: "If once it should be allowed that things may come to pass without a Cause, we should not only have no proof of the Being of God, but we should be without evidence of anything whatsoever but our own immediately present ideas and consciousness. For we have no way to prove anything else but by arguing from effects to causes." Yet the responsibility of a man abides

through all his helplessness: "The Case of such as are given up of God to Sin and of fallen Man in general, proves moral Necessity and Inability to be consistent with blameworthiness." Good Dr. Holmes has said somewhere in his jaunty way that it was only decent for a man who believed in this doctrine to go mad. Well, Cowper believed in it; there was no insulating pad of worldly indifference between his faith and his nerves, and he went mad.

And he was in another way the victim of his age. We have heard him comparing his days at Huntingdon with *Rousseau's description of an English morning*. Unfortunately, the malady also which came into the world with Rousseau, the morbid exaggeration of personal consciousness, had laid hold of Cowper. Even when suffering from the earlier stroke he had written these words to his cousin: "I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with"; and this sense of his singularity follows him through life. During the Huntingdon days it takes the form of a magnified confidence that Heaven is peculiarly concerned in his rescue from the fires of affliction; after the overthrow at Olney it is reversed, and fills him with the certainty that God has marked him out among all mankind for the special display of vengeance:

> This all-too humble soul would arrogate
> Unto itself some signalising hate
> From the supreme indifference of Fate!

Writing to his mentor, John Newton (who had left Olney), he declares that there is a mystery in his destruction; and again to Lady Hesketh: "Mine has been a life of wonders for many years, and a life of wonders I in my heart believe it will be to the end." More than once in reply to those who would console him he avers that there is a singularity in his case which marks it off from that of all other men, that Providence has chosen him as a special object of its hostility. In Rousseau, whose mission was to preach the essential goodness of mankind, the union of aggravated egotism with his humanitarian doctrine brought about the conviction that the whole human race was plotting his ruin. In Cowper, whose mind dwelt on the power and mercies of Providence, this self-consciousness united with his Calvinism to produce the belief that God had determined to ensnare and destroy his soul. Such was the strange twist that accompanied the birth of romanticism in France and in England.

The conviction came upon Cowper through the agency of dreams and imaginary voices. The depression first seized him on the 24th of January, 1773. About a month later a vision of the night troubled his sleep, so distinct and terrible that the effect on his brain could never be wholly dispelled. Years afterwards he wrote to a friend:

> My thoughts are clad in a sober livery, for the most part as grave as that of a bishop's servants. They turn upon spiritual subjects; but the tallest fellow and the

loudest among them all is he who is continually crying with a loud voice, *Actum est de te; periisti!* You wish for more attention, I for less. Dissipation [distraction] itself would be welcome to me, so it were not a vicious one; but however earnestly invited, is coy, and keeps at a distance. Yet with all this distressing gloom upon my mind, I experience, as you do, the slipperiness of the present hour, and the rapidity with which time escapes me. Every thing around us, and every thing that befalls us, constitutes a variety, which, whether agreeable or otherwise, has still a thievish propensity, and steals from us days, months, and years, with such unparalleled address, that even while we say they are here, they are gone.

That apparently was the sentence which sounded his doom on the night of dreams: *Actum est de te; periisti*—it is done with thee, thou hast perished! and no domestic happiness, or worldly success, or wise counsel could ever, save for a little while, lull him to forgetfulness. He might have said to his friends, as Socrates replied to one who came to offer him deliverance from jail: "Such words I seem to hear, as the mystic worshippers seem to hear the piping of flutes; and the sound of this voice so murmurs in my ears that I can hear no other."

But it must not be supposed from all this that Cowper's letters are morbid in tone or filled with the dejection of melancholia. Their merit, on the contrary, lies primarily in their dignity and restraint, in a certain high-bred ease, which is equally manifest in the language and the thought.

Curiously enough, after the fatal visitation religion becomes entirely subordinate in his correspondence, and only at rare intervals does he allude to his peculiar experience. He writes for the most part like a man of the world who has seen the fashions of life and has sought refuge from their vanity. If I were seeking for a comparison to relieve the quality of these Olney letters (and it is these that form the real charm of Cowper's correspondence), I would turn to Charles Lamb. The fact that both men wrote under the shadow of insanity brings them together immediately, and there are other points of resemblance. Both are notable among English letter-writers for the exquisite grace of their language, but if I had to choose between the two the one whose style possessed the most enduring charm, a charm that appealed to the heart most equally at all seasons and left the reader always in that state of quiet satisfaction which is the office of the purest taste, I should name Cowper. The wit is keener in Lamb and above all more artful; there is a certain petulance of humour in him which surprises us oftener into laughter, the pathos at times is more poignant; but the effort to be entertaining is also more apparent, and the continual holding up of the mind by the unexpected word or phrase becomes a little wearisome in the end. The attraction of Cowper's style is in the perfect balance of the members, an art which has become almost lost since the eighteenth century, and in the spirit

of repose which awakens in the reader such a feeling of easy elevation as remains for a while after the book is laid down. Lamb is of the city, Cowper of the fields. Both were admirers of Vincent Bourne; Lamb chose naturally for translation the poems of city life—*The Ballad Singers*, *The Rival Bells*, the *Epitaph on a Dog*:

> Poor Irus' faithful wolf-dog here I lie,
> That wont to tend my old blind master's steps,
> His guide and guard; nor, while my service lasted,
> Had he occasion for that staff, with which
> He now goes picking out his path in fear
> Over the highways and crossings, but would plant
> Safe in the conduct of my friendly string,
> A firm foot forward still, till he had reached
> His poor seat on some stone, nigh where the tide
> Of passers-by in thickest confluence flowed:
> To whom with loud and passionate laments
> From morn to eve his dark estate he wailed.

Cowper just as inevitably selected the fables and country-pieces—*The Glowworm*, *The Jackdaw*, *The Cricket*:

> Little inmate, full of mirth,
> Chirping on my kitchen hearth,
> Wheresoe'er be thine abode,
> Always harbinger of good,
> Pay me for thy warm retreat,
> With a song more soft and sweet;
> In return thou shalt receive
> Such a strain as I can give.
>
> . . . . .

Though in voice and shape they be
Formed as if akin to thee,
Thou surpassest, happier far,
Happiest grasshoppers that are;
Theirs is but a summer song,
Thine endures the winter long,
Unimpaired, and shrill, and clear,
Melody throughout the year.

Neither night nor dawn of day
Puts a period to thy play:
Sing, then—and extend thy span
Far beyond the date of man;
Wretched man, whose years are spent
In repining discontent,
Lives not, aged though he be,
Half a span, compared with thee.

There is in the blind beggar something of the quality of Lamb's own life, with its inherent loneliness imposed by an ever-present grief in the midst of London's noisy streets; and in the verses to the cricket it is scarcely fanciful to find an image of Cowper's "domestic life in rural leisure passed." Lamb was twenty-five when Cowper died, in the year 1800. One is tempted to continue in the language of fable and ask what would have happened had the city mouse allured the country mouse to visit his chambers in Holborn or Southampton buildings. To be sure there was no luxury of purple robe and mighty feast in that abode; but I think the revelry and the wit, and that hound of intemperance which always pursued poor Lamb, would have fright-

ened his guest back to his hiding-place in the wilderness:

> . . . me silva cavusque
> Tutus ab insidiis tenui solabitur ervo!

Cowper, in fact, was the first writer to introduce that intimate union of the home affections with the love of country which, in the works of Miss Austen and a host of others, was to become one of the unique charms and consolations of English literature. And the element of austere gloom in his character, rarely exposed, but always, we know, in the background, is what most of all relieves his letters from insipidity. Lamb strove deliberately by a kind of crackling mirth to drown the sound of the grave inner voice; Cowper listened reverently to its admonitions, even to its threatenings; he spoke little of what he heard, but it tempered his wit and the snug comfort of his life with that profounder consciousness of what, disguise it as we will, lies at the bottom of the world's experience. We call him mad because he believed himself abandoned of God, and shuddered with remorseless conviction. Put aside for a moment the language of the market place, and be honest with ourselves: is there not a little of our fate, of the fate of mankind, in Cowper's desolation? After all, was his melancholy radically different from the state of that great Frenchman, a lover of his letters withal, Sainte-Beuve, who dared not for a day rest from

benumbing labour lest the questionings of his own heart should make themselves heard, and who wrote to a friend that no consolation could reach that settled sadness which was rooted in *la grande absence de Dieu?*

It is not strange that the society from which Cowper fled should have seemed to him whimsical and a little mad. "A line of Bourne's," he says, "is very expressive of the spectacle which this world exhibits, tragi-comical as the incidents of it are, absurd in themselves, but terrible in their consequences:

> Sunt res humanæ flebile ludibrium."

Nor is it strange that he wondered sometimes at the gayety of his own letters: "It is as if Harlequin should intrude himself into the gloomy chamber, where a corpse is deposited in state. His antic gesticulations would be unseasonable, at any rate, but more especially so if they should distort the features of the mournful attendants into laughter." But it is not the humour of the letters that attracts us so much as their picture of quiet home delights in the midst of a stormy world. We linger most over the account of those still evenings by the fireside, while Mrs. Unwin, and perhaps their friend Lady Austen, was busy with her needles—

> Thy needles, once a shining store,
> For my sake restless heretofore,
> Now rust disused, and shine no more,
> My Mary!—

and while Cowper read aloud from some book of travels and mingled his comments with the story of the wanderer:

> My imagination is so captivated upon these occasions that I seem to partake with the navigators in all the dangers they encountered. I lose my anchor ; my mainsail is rent into shreds ; I kill a shark, and by signs converse with a Patagonian, and all this without moving from the fireside.

And here I cannot but regret again that we have not an edition of these letters interspersed with the passages of *The Task*, which describe the same scenes. I confess that two-thirds at least of that poem is indeed a task to-day. The long tirades against vice, and the equally long preaching of virtue, all in blank verse, lack, to my ear, the vivacity and the sustaining power of the earlier rhymed poems, such as *Hope* (that superb moralising on the poet's own life) and *Retirement*, to name the best of the series. But the fourth book of *The Task*, and, indeed, all the exquisite genre pictures of the poem:

> Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
> Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
> And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
> Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
> That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
> So let us welcome peaceful evening in—

all this intimate correspondence with the world in verse is not only interesting in itself, but gains

a double charm by association with the letters. "We were just sitting down to supper," writes Cowper to Mrs. Unwin's son, "when a hasty rap alarmed us. I ran to the hall window, for the hares being loose, it was impossible to open the door." It is fortunate for the reader if his memory at these words calls up those lines of *The Task:*

> One sheltered hare
> Has never heard the sanguinary yell
> Of cruel man, exulting in her woes.
> Innocent partner of my peaceful home,
> Whom ten long years' experience of my care
> Has made at last familiar; she has lost
> Much of her vigilant instinctive dread,
> Not needful here beneath a roof like mine.
> Yes—thou mayst eat thy bread, and lick the hand
> That feeds thee; *thou mayst frolic on the floor*
> *At evening*, and at night retire secure
> To thy straw couch, and slumber unalarmed;
> For I have gained thy confidence, have pledged
> All that is human in me, to protect
> Thine unsuspecting gratitude and love.
> If I survive thee, I will dig thy grave;
> And when I place thee in it, sighing say,
> I knew at least one hare that had a friend.

How much of the letters could be illustrated in this way—the walks about Olney, the gardening, the greenhouse, the lamentations over the American Rebellion, the tirades against fickle fashions, and a thousand other matters that go to make up their quiet yet variegated substance. For it

must not be supposed that Cowper, in these Olney days at least, was ever dull. I will quote the opening paragraph of one other letter—to his friend the Rev. William Bull, great preacher of Newport Pagnell, and, alas! great smoker,[1] "smoke-inhaling Bull," "Dear Taureau"—as a change from the more serious theme, and then pass on:

Mon aimable et très cher Ami—It is not in the power of chaises or chariots to carry you where my affections will not follow you; if I heard that you were gone to finish your days in the Moon, I should not love you the

[1] How refreshing is that whiff of good honest smoke in the abstemious lives of Cowper and John Newton! I have just seen, in W. Tuckwell's *Reminiscences of a Radical Parson*, a happy allusion to William Bull's pipes: "To Olney, under the auspices of a benevolent Quaker. . . . I saw all the relics: the parlour where bewitching Lady Austen's shuttlecock flew to and fro; the hole made in the wall for the entrance and exit of the hares; the poet's bedroom; Mrs. Unwin's room, where, as she knelt by the bed in prayer, her clothes caught fire. The garden was in other hands, but I obtained leave to enter it. Of course, I went straight to the summer-house, small, and with not much glass, the wall and ceiling covered with names, Cowper's wig-block on the table, *a hole in the floor where that mellow divine, the Reverend Mr. Bull, kept his pipes;* outside, the bed of pinks celebrated affectionately in one of his letters to Joseph Hill, pipings from which are still growing in my garden."—The date of the Rev. Mr. Tuckwell's visit to Olney is not indicated, but his *Reminiscences* were published in the present year, 1905.

less; but should contemplate the place of your abode, as often as it appeared in the heavens, and say—Farewell, my friend, forever! Lost, but not forgotten! Live happy in thy lantern, and smoke the remainder of thy pipes in peace! Thou art rid of Earth, at least of all its cares, and so far can I rejoice in thy removal.

Might not that have been written by Lamb to one of his cronies—by a Lamb still of the eighteenth century?

But the Olney days must come to a close. After nineteen years of residence there Cowper and his companion (was ever love like theirs, that was yet not love!) were induced to move to Weston Lodge, a more convenient house in the village of Weston Underwood, not far away. Somehow, with the change, the letters lose the freshness of their peculiar interest. We shall never again find him writing of his home as he had written before of Olney:

The world is before me; I am not shut up in the Bastille; there are no moats about my castle, *no locks upon my gates of which I have not the key;* but an invisible, uncontrollable agency, a local attachment, an inclination more forcible than I ever felt, even to the place of my birth, serves me for prison-walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass. . . . The very stones in the garden-walls are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal, and am persuaded that, were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects which to all the world

beside would be at least indifferent; some of them perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighbouring cottages, disgusting. But so it is, and it is so, because here is to be my abode, and because such is the appointment of Him that placed me in it.

Often while reading the letters from Weston one wishes he had never turned the key in the lock of that beloved enclosure. Fame had come to him now. His correspondence is distributed among more people; he is neither quite of the world, nor of the cloister. Above all, he is busy —endlessly, wearisomely busy—with his translation of Homer. I have often wondered what the result would have been had his good friends and neighbours the Throckmortons converted him from his rigid Calvinism to their own milder Catholic faith, and set him in spiritual comfort to writing another *Task*. Idle conjecture! For the rest of his life he toiled resolutely at a translation which the world did not want and which brought its own tedium into his letters. And then comes the pitiful collapse of Mrs. Unwin, broken at last by the long vigil over her sick companion:

> The twentieth year is well-nigh past,
> Since first our sky was overcast;
> Ah would that this might be the last!
> My Mary!
>
> Thy spirits have a fainter flow,
> I see thee daily weaker grow—
> 'T was my distress that brought thee low,
> My Mary!

The end is tragic, terrible. In 1794 Cowper sank into a state of melancholia, in which for hours he would walk backward and forward in his study like a caged tiger. Mrs. Unwin was dying. At last a cousin, the Rev. John Johnson, took charge of the invalids and carried them away into Norfolk. The last few letters, written in Cowper's ever-dwindling moments of sanity, are without a parallel in English. The contrast of the wild images with the stately and restrained language leaves an impression of awe, almost of fear, on the mind. "My thoughts," he writes to Lady Hesketh, "are like loose and dry sand, which the closer it is grasped slips the sooner away"; and again to the same faithful friend from Mundesley on the coast:

> The cliff is here of a height that it is terrible to look down from; and yesterday evening, by moonlight, I passed sometimes within a foot of the edge of it, from which to have fallen would probably have been to be dashed in pieces. But though to have been dashed in pieces would perhaps have been best for me, I shrunk from the precipice, and am waiting to be dashed in pieces by other means. At two miles distance on the coast is a solitary pillar of rock, that the crumbling cliff has left at the high-water mark. I have visited it twice, and have found it an emblem of myself. Torn from my natural connections, I stand alone and expect the storm that shall displace me.

There is in this that sheer physical horror which it is not good to write or to read. Somewhere in

his earlier letters he quotes the well-known line of Horace: "We and all ours are but a debt to death." How the commonplace words come back with frightfully intensified meaning as we read this story of decay! It is not good, I say, to see the nakedness of human fate so ruthlessly revealed. The mind reverts instinctively from this scene to the homely life at Olney. Might it not be that if Cowper had remained in that spot where the very stones of the garden walls were endeared to him, if he had never been torn from his natural connections—might it not be that he would have passed from the world in the end saddened but not frenzied by his dreams? At least in our thoughts let us leave him, not standing alone on the crumbling cliff over a hungry sea, but walking with his sympathetic companion arm in arm in the peaceful valley of the Ouse.

WHITTIER THE POET

LAST month we took the new edition of Cowper's Letters as an occasion to consider the life of the poet, who brought the quiet affections of the home into English literature, and that may be our excuse for waiving the immediate pressure of the book-market and turning to the American poet whose inspiration springs largely from the same source. Different as the two writers are in so many respects, different above all in their education and surroundings, yet it would not be difficult to find points of resemblance to justify such a sequence. In both the spirit of religion was bound up with the cult of seclusion; to both the home was a refuge from the world; to both this comfort was sweetened by the care of a beloved companion, though neither of them ever married. But, after all, no apology is needed, I trust, for writing about a poet who is very dear to me as to many others, and who has suffered more than most at the hands of his biographers and critics.

It should seem that no one could go through Whittier's poems even casually without remarking the peculiar beauty of the idyl called *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim*. It is one of the longest and, all things considered, quite the most char-

acteristic of his works. Yet Mr. Pickard in his official biography brings the poem into no relief; Professor Carpenter names it in passing without a word of comment; and Colonel Higginson in his volume in the English Men of Letters Series does not mention it at all—but then he has a habit of omitting the essential. Among those who have written critically of American literature the poem is not even named, so far as I am aware, by Mr. Stedman or by Professors Richardson, Lawton, Wendell, and Trent. I confess that this conspiracy of silence, as I hunted through one historian and critic after another, grew disconcerting, and I began to distrust my own judgment until I chanced upon a confirmation in two passages of Whittier's letters. Writing of *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim* to his publisher in May, 1872, he said: "I think honestly it is as good as (if not better than) any long poem I have written"; and a little later to Celia Thaxter: "It is as long as *Snow-Bound*, and better, but nobody will find it out." One suspects that all these gentlemen in treating of Whittier have merely followed the line of least resistance, without taking much care to form an independent opinion; and the line of least resistance has a miserable trick of leading us astray. In the first place, Whittier's share in the Abolition and other reforming movements bulks so large in the historians' eyes that sometimes they seem almost to forget Whittier the poet. And the critics have taken the same cue. "Whittier,"

says one of them, "will be remembered even more as the trumpet-voice of Emancipation than as the peaceful singer of rural New England."

The error, if it may be said with reverence, can be traced even higher, and in Whittier we meet only one more witness to the unconcern of Nature over the marring of her finer products. The wonder is not that he turned out so much that is faulty, but that now and then he attained such exquisite grace. Whittier was born, December 17, 1807, in East Haverhill, in the old homestead which still stands, a museum now, hidden among the hills from any other human habitation. It is a country not without quiet charm, though the familiar lines of *Snow-Bound* make us think of it first as beaten by storm and locked in by frost. And, notwithstanding the solace of an affectionate home, life on the farm was unnecessarily hard. The habits of the grim pioneers had persisted and weighed heavily on their dwindled descendants. Thus the Whittiers, who used to drive regularly to the Quaker meeting at Amesbury, eight miles distant, are said to have taken no pains to protect themselves from the bleakest weather. The poet suffered in body all his life from the rigour of this discipline; nor did he suffer less from insufficiency of mental training. Not only was the family poor, but it even appears that the sober tradition of his people looked askance at the limited means of education at hand. Only at the earnest solicitation of outsiders was the boy allowed to attend

the academy at Haverhill. Meanwhile, he was a little of everything: farm worker, shoemaker, teacher—he seems to have shifted about as chance or necessity directed. There were few—he has told us how few—books in the house, and little time for reading those he could borrow. But if he read little, he wrote prodigiously. The story of his first printed poem in the *Free Press* of Newburyport and of the encouragement given him by the far-sighted editor, William Lloyd Garrison, is one of the best known and most picturesque incidents in American letters. The young poet—he was then nineteen—was launched; from that time he became an assiduous writer for the press, and was at intervals editor of various country or propagandist newspapers.

The great currents of literary tradition reached him vaguely from afar and troubled his dreams. Burns fell early into his hands, and the ambition was soon formed of transferring the braes and byres of Scotland to the hills and folds of New England. The rhythms of Thomas Moore rang seductively in his ears. Byron, too, by a spirit of contrast, appealed to the Quaker lad, and one may read in Mr. Pickard's capital little book, *Whittier-Land*, verses and fragments of letters which show how deeply that poison of the age had bitten into his heart. But the influence of those sons of fire was more than counteracted by the gentle spirit of Mrs. Hemans—indeed, the worst to be said of Whittier is that never, to the

day of his death, did he quite throw off allegiance to the facile and innocent muse of that lady. It is only right to add that in his later years, especially in the calm that followed the civil war, he became a pretty widely read man, a man of far more culture than he is commonly supposed to have been.

Such was the boy, then—thirsting for fame, scantily educated, totally without critical guidance or environment, looking this way and that—who was thrust under the two dominant influences of his time and place. To one of these, transcendentalism, we owe nearly all that is highest, and unfortunately much also that is most inchoate, in New England literature. Its spirit of complacent self-dependence was dangerous at the best, although in Whittier I cannot see that it did more than confirm his habit of uncritical prolixity; it could offer no spiritual seduction to one who held liberally the easy doctrine of the Friends. But to the other influence he fell a natural prey. The whole tradition of the Quakers—the memory of Pastorius, whom he was to sing as the Pennsylvania Pilgrim; the inheritance of saintly John Woolman, whose Journal he was to edit—prepared him to take part in the great battle of the Abolitionists. From that memorable hour when he met Garrison face to face on his Haverhill farm to the ending of the war in 1865, he was no longer free to develop intellectually, but was a servant of reform and politics. I am not, of

course, criticising that movement or its achievement; I regret only that one whose temper and genius called for fostering in quiet fields should have been dragged into that stormy arena. As he says in lines that are true if not elegant:

> Hater of din and riot,
> He lived in days unquiet;
> And, lover of all beauty,
> Trod the hard ways of duty.

It is not merely that political interests absorbed the energy which would otherwise have gone to letters; the knowledge of life acquired might have compensated and more than compensated for less writing, and, indeed, he wrote too much as it was. The difficulty is rather that "the pledged philanthropy of earth" somehow militates against art, as Whittier himself felt. Not only the poems actually written to forward the propaganda are for the most part dismal reading, but something of their tone has crept into other poems, with an effect to-day not far from cant. Twice the cry of the liberator in Whittier rose to noble writing. But in both cases it is not the mere pleading of reform but a very human and personal indignation that speaks. In *Massachusetts to Virginia* this feeling of outrage calls forth one of the most stirring pieces of personification ever written, nor can I imagine a day when a man of Massachusetts shall be able to read it without a tingling of the blood, or a Virginian born hear it without a sense

of unacknowledged shame; in *Ichabod* he uttered a word of individual scorn that will rise up for quotation whenever any strong leader misuses, or is thought to misuse, his powers. Every one knows the lines in which Webster is pilloried for his defection:

> Of all we loved and honoured, naught
> Save power remains;
> A fallen angel's pride of thought,
> Still strong in chains.
>
> All else is gone; from those great eyes
> The soul has fled;
> When faith is lost, when honour dies,
> The man is dead!
>
> Then pay the reverence of old days
> To his dead fame;
> Walk backward, with averted gaze,
> And hide the shame!

It is instructive that only when his note is thus pierced by individual emotion does the reformer attain to universality of appeal. Unfortunately most of Whittier's slave songs sink down to a dreary level—down to the almost humorous bathos of the lines suggested by *Uncle Tom's Cabin:*

> Dry the tears for holy Eva,
> With the blessed angels leave her. . . .

What he needed above everything else, what his surroundings were least of all able to give

him, was a canon of taste, which would have driven him to stiffen his work, to purge away the flaccid and set the genuinely poetical in stronger relief—a purely literary canon which would have offset the moralist and reformer in him, and made it impossible for him (and his essays show that the critical vein was not absent by nature) to write of Longfellow's *Psalm of Life:* "These nine simple verses are worth more than all the dreams of Shelley, and Keats, and Wordsworth. They are alive and vigorous with the spirit of the day in which we live—the moral steam enginery of an age of action." While Tennyson and Matthew Arnold were writing in England, the earlier tradition had not entirely died out in America that the first proof of genius is an abandonment of one's mind to temperament and "inspiration." Byron had written verse as vacillating and formless as any of Whittier's; Shelley had poured forth page after page of effusive vapourings; Keats learned the lesson of self-restraint almost too late; Wordsworth indulged in platitudes as simpering as "holy Eva"; but none of these poets suffered so deplorably from the lack of criticism as the finest of our New England spirits. The very magnificence of their rebellion, the depth and originality of their emotion, were a compensation for their licence, were perhaps inevitably involved in it. The humbler theme of Whittier's muse can offer no such apology; he who sings the commonplace joys and cares of the heart needs above all

to attain that *simplex munditiis* which is the last refinement of taste; lacking that, he becomes himself commonplace. And Whittier knew this. In the Proem to the first general collection of his poems, he wrote:

> Of mystic beauty, dreamy grace,
> No rounded art the lack supplies;
> Unskilled the subtle line to trace,
> Or softer shades of Nature's face,
> I view her common forms with unanointed eyes.
>
> Nor mine the seer-like power to show
> The secrets of the heart and mind;
> *To drop the plummet line below*
> *Our common world of joy and woe,*
> *A more intense despair or brighter hope to find.*

But at this point we must part company with his confession. His reward is not that he showed "a hate of tyranny intense" or laid his gifts on the shrine of Freedom, but that more completely than any other poet he developed the peculiarly English *ideal of the home* which Cowper first brought intimately into letters, and added to it those *homely comforts of the spirit* which Cowper never felt. With Longfellow he was destined to throw the glamour of the imagination over "our common world of joy and woe."

Perhaps something in his American surroundings fitted him peculiarly for this humbler rôle. The fact that the men who had made the new colony belonged to the middle class of society

tended to raise the idea of home into undisputed honour, and the isolation and perils of their situation in the earlier years had enhanced this feeling into something akin to a cult. America is still the land of homes. That may be a lowly theme for a poet; to admire such poetry may, indeed it does, seem to many to smack of a bourgeois taste. And yet there is an implication here that carries a grave injustice. For myself, I admit that Whittier is one of the authors of my choice, and that I read him with ever fresh delight; I even think there must be something spurious in that man's culture whose appreciation of Milton or Shelley dulls his ear to the paler but very refined charm of Whittier. If truth be told, there is sometimes a kind of exquisite content in turning from the pretentious poets who exact so much of the reader to the more immediate appeal of our sweet Quaker. In comparison with those more exalted muses his nymph is like the nut-brown lass of the old song—

> But when we come where comfort is,
> She never will say No.

And often, after fatiguing the brain with the searchings and inquisitive flight of the Masters, we are ready to say with Whittier:

> I break my pilgrim staff, I lay
> Aside the toiling oar;
> The angel sought so far away
> I welcome at my door.

There, to me at least, and not in the ballads which are more generally praised, lies the rare excellence of Whittier. True enough, some of these narrative poems are spirited and admirably composed. Now and then, as in *Cassandra Southwick*, they strike a note which reminds one singularly of the real ballads of the people; in fact, it would not be fanciful to discover a certain resemblance between the manner of their production and of the old popular songs. Their publication in obscure newspapers, from which they were copied and gradually sent the rounds of the country, is not essentially different from the way in which many of the ballads were probably spread abroad. The very atmosphere that surrounded the boy in a land where the traditions of border warfare and miraculous events still ran from mouth to mouth prepared him for such balladry. Take, for example, this account of his youth from the Introduction to *Snow-Bound:*

> Under such circumstances story-telling was a necessary resource in the long winter evenings. My father when a young man had traversed the wilderness to Canada, and could tell us of his adventures with Indians and wild beasts, and of his sojourn in the French villages. My uncle was ready with his record of hunting and fishing, and, it must be confessed, with stories, which he at least half-believed, of witchcraft and apparitions. My mother, who was born in the Indian-haunted region of Somersworth, New Hampshire, between Dover and Portsmouth,

told us of the inroads of the savages, and the narrow escape of her ancestors.

No doubt this legendary training helped to give more life to Whittier's ballads and border tales than ordinarily enters into that rather factitious form of composition; and for a while he made a deliberate attempt to create out of it a native literature. But the effect was still deeper, by a kind of contrast, on his poetry of the home. After several incursions into the world as editor and agitator, he was compelled by ill health to settle down finally in the Amesbury house, which he had bought in 1836; and there with little interruption he lived from his thirty-third to his eighty-fifth year, the year of his death. In *Snow-Bound* his memory called up a picture of the old Haverhill homestead, unsurpassed in its kind for sincerity and picturesqueness; in poem after poem he celebrated directly or indirectly "the river hemmed with leaning trees," the hills and ponds, the very roads and bridges of the land about these sheltered towns. On the one hand, the recollection of the wilder life through which his parents had come added to the snugness and intimacy of these peaceful scenes, and, on the other hand, the encroachment of trade and factories into their midst lent a poignancy of regret for a grace that was passing away. Mr. Pickard's little guide-book, to which I have already referred, brings together happily the innumerable allusions of local interest; there is no spot in America, not

even Concord, where the light of fancy lies so entrancingly:

> A tender glow, exceeding fair,
> A dream of day without its glare.

For it must be seen that the crudeness of Whittier's education, and the thorny ways into which he was drawn, marred a large part, but by no means all, of his work. There are a few poems in his collection of an admirable craftsmanship in that genre which is none the less difficult—which I sometimes think is almost more difficult—because it lies so perilously near the trivial and mean. There are others which need only a little pruning, perhaps a little heightening here and there, to approach the same perfection of charm. Especially they have that harmony of tone which arises from the unspoiled sincerity of the writer and ends by subduing the reader to a restful sympathy with their mood. No one can read much in Whittier without feeling that these hills and valleys about the Merrimac have become one of the inalienable domiciles of the spirit—a familiar place where the imagination dwells with untroubled delight. Even the little things, the flowers and birds of the country, are made to contribute to the sense of homely content. There is one poem in particular which has always seemed to me significant of Whittier's manner, and a comparison of it with the famous flower poems of Wordsworth will show the difference between

what I call the poetry of the hearth and the poetry of intimate nature. It was written to celebrate a gift of *Pressed Gentian* that hung at the poet's window, presenting to wayside travellers only a "grey disk of clouded glass":

> They cannot from their outlook see
> The perfect grace it hath for me;
> For there the flower, whose fringes through
> The frosty breath of autumn blew,
> Turns from without its face of bloom
> To the warm tropic of my room,
> As fair as when beside its brook
> The hue of bending skies it took.
>
> So from the trodden ways of earth
> Seem some sweet souls who veil their worth,
> And offer to the careless glance
> The clouding grey of circumstance. . . .

There is not a little of self-portraiture in this image of the flower, and it may be that some who have written of Whittier patronisingly are like the hasty passer-by—they see only the *grey disk of clouded glass.*

And the emotion that furnishes the loudest note to most poets is subdued in Whittier to the same gentle tone. To be sure, there is evidence enough that his heart in youth was touched almost to a Byronic melancholy, and he himself somewhere remarks that "Few guessed beneath his aspect grave, What passions strove in chains." But was there not a remnant of self-deception

here? Do not the calmest and wisest of us like to believe we are calm and wise by virtue of vigorous self-repression? Wordsworth, we remember, explained the absence of love from his poetry on the ground that his passions were too violent to allow any safe expression of them. Possibly they were. Certainly, in Whittier's verse we have no reflection of those tropic heats, but only "the Indian summer of the heart." The very title, *Memories*, of his best-known love poem (based on a real experience, the details of which have recently been revealed) suggests the mood in which he approaches this subject. It is not the quest of desire he sings, but the home-coming after the frustrate search and the dreaming recollection by the hearth of an ancient loss. In the same way, his ballad *Maud Muller*, which is supposed to appeal only to the unsophisticated, is attuned to that shamelessly provincial rhyme,

> For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
> The saddest are these: "It might have been!"

It is a little so with us all, perhaps, as it was with the judge and the maiden; only, as we learn the lesson of years, the disillusion is likely to be mingled strangely with relief, and the sadness to take on a most comfortable and flattering Quaker drab—as it did with our "hermit of Amesbury."

If love was a memory, religion was for Whittier a hope and an ever-present consolation—peculiarly

a consolation, because he brought into it the same thought of home-coming that marks his treatment of nature and the passions. Partly, this was due to his inherited creed, which was tolerant enough to soften theological dispute: "Quakerism," he once wrote to Lucy Larcom, "has no Church of its own—it belongs to the Church Universal and Invisible." In great part the spirit of his faith was private to him; it even called for a note of apology to the sterner of his brethren:

O friends! with whom my feet have trod
The quiet aisles of prayer,
Glad witness to your zeal for God
And love of man I bear.

I trace your lines of argument;
Your logic linked and strong
I weigh as one who dreads dissent,
And fears a doubt as wrong.

But still my human hands are weak
To hold your iron creeds:
Against the words ye bid me speak
My heart within me pleads. . . .

And the inimitably tender conclusion:

And so beside the Silent Sea
I wait the muffled oar;
No harm from Him can come to me
On ocean or on shore.

I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;

I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.

O brothers! if my faith is vain,
If hopes like these betray,
Pray for me that my feet may gain
The sure and safer way.

And Thou, O Lord! by whom are seen
Thy creatures as they be,
Forgive me if too close I lean
My human heart on Thee!

Not a strenuous mood it may be, or very exalted —not the mood of the battling saints, but one familiar to many a troubled man in his hours of simpler trust. We have been led to Whittier through the familiar poetry of Cowper; consider what it would have been to that tormented soul if for one day he could have forgotten the awe of his divinity and *leaned his human heart* on God. It is not good for any but the strongest to dwell too much with abstractions of the mind. And, after all, change the phrasing a little, substitute if you choose some other intuitive belief for the poet's childlike faith, and you will be surprised to find how many of the world's philosophers would accept the response of Whittier:

We search the world for truth; we cull
The good, the pure, the beautiful,
From graven stone and written scroll,
From all old flower-fields of the soul;
And, weary seekers of the best,
We come back laden from our quest,

To find that all the sages said
Is in the Book our mothers read.

Such a rout of the intellect may seem ignominious, but is it any more so than the petulance of Renan because all his learning had only brought him to the same state of skepticism as that of the gamin in the streets of Paris? Our tether is short enough, whichever way we seek escape. It is worth noting that in his essay on Baxter (he who conceived of the saints' rest in a very different spirit) Whittier blames that worthy just for the exaltation of his character. "In our view," he says, "this was its radical defect. He had too little of humanity, he felt too little of the attraction of this world, and lived too exclusively in the spiritual and the unearthly."

And if Whittier's faith was simple and human, his vision of the other world was strangely like the remembrance of a home that we have left in youth. There is a striking expression of this in one of his prose tales, now almost forgotten despite their elements of pale but very genuine humour and pathos, as if written by an attenuated Hawthorne. The good physician, Dr. Singletary, and his friends are discussing the future life, and says one of them:

"Have you not felt at times that our ordinary conceptions of heaven itself, derived from the vague hints and Oriental imagery of the Scriptures, are sadly inadequate to our human wants and hopes? How gladly would we forego the golden streets and gates of pearl, the thrones,

temples, and harps, for the sunset lights of our native valleys; the woodpaths, where moss carpets are woven with violets and wild flowers; the songs of birds, the low of cattle, the hum of bees in the apple-blossoms—the sweet, familiar voices of human life and nature! In the place of strange splendours and unknown music, should we not welcome rather whatever reminded us of the common sights and sounds of our old home?"

It was eminently proper that, as the poet lay awaiting death, with his kinsfolk gathered about him, one of them should have recited the stanzas of his psalm *At Last:*

When on my day of life the night is falling,
And, in the winds from unsunned spaces blown,
I hear far voices out of darkness calling
My feet to paths unknown,

Thou who hast made my home of life so pleasant,
Leave not its tenant when its walls decay;
O Love Divine, O Helper ever present,
Be Thou my strength and stay!

. . . . . .

I have but Thee, my Father! let Thy spirit
Be with me then to comfort and uphold;
No gate of pearl, no branch of palm I merit,
Nor street of shining gold.

Suffice it if—my good and ill unreckoned,
And both forgiven through Thy abounding grace—
I find myself by hands familiar beckoned
Unto my fitting place.

I would not call this the highest religious poetry, pure and sweet as it may be. Something

still is lacking, but to see that want fulfilled one must travel out of Whittier's age, back through all the eighteenth century, back into the seventeenth. There you will find it in Vaughan and Herbert and sometimes in Marvell—poets whom Whittier read and admired. Take two poems from these two ages, place them side by side, and the one thing needed fairly strikes the eyes. The first poem Whittier wrote after the death of his sister Elizabeth (who had been to him what Mrs. Unwin had been to Cowper) was *The Vanishers*, founded on a pretty superstition he had read in Schoolcraft:

Sweetest of all childlike dreams
In the simple Indian lore
Still to me the legend seems
Of the shapes who flit before.

Flitting, passing, seen, and gone,
Never reached nor found at rest,
Baffling search, but beckoning on
To the Sunset of the Blest.

From the clefts of mountain rocks,
Through the dark of lowland firs,
Flash the eyes and flow the locks
Of the mystic Vanishers!

Now Vaughan, too, wrote a poem on those gone from him:

They are all gone into the world of light,
And I alone sit lingering here;
Their very memory is fair and bright,
And my sad thoughts doth clear.

It glows and glitters in my cloudy breast,
Like stars upon some gloomy grove,
Or those faint beams in which this hill is dress'd,
After the sun's remove.

I see them walking in an air of glory,
Whose light doth trample on my days:
My days, which are at best but dull and hoary,
Mere glimmering and decays.

It is not a fair comparison to set one of Whittier's inferior productions beside this superbest hymn of an eloquent age; but would any religious poem of the nineteenth century, even the best of them, fare much better? There is indeed one thing lacking, and that is *ecstasy*. But ecstasy demands a different kind of faith from that of Whittier's day or ours, and, missing that, I do not see why we should begrudge our praise to a genius of pure and quiet charm.

I have already intimated that too complete a preoccupation with the reforming and political side of Whittier's life has kept the biographers from recognising that charm in what he himself regarded as his best poem. In 1872, in the full maturity of his powers and when the national peace had allowed him to indulge the peace in his own heart, he wrote his exquisite idyl, *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim*. Perhaps the mere name of the poem may suggest another cause why it has been overlooked. Whittier has always stood pre-eminently as the exponent of New England life, and for very natural reasons. And yet it

would not be difficult to show from passages in his prose works that his heart was never quite at ease in that Puritan land. The recollection of the sufferings which his people had undergone for their faith' sake rankled a little in his breast, and he was never in perfect sympathy with the austerity of New England traditions. We catch a tone of relief as he turns in imagination to the peace that dwelt "within the land of Penn":

> Who knows what goadings in their sterner way
> O'er jagged ice, relieved by granite grey,
> Blew round the men of Massachusetts Bay?
>
> What hate of heresy the east-wind woke?
> What hints of pitiless power and terror spoke
> In waves that on their iron coast-line broke?

It was no doubt during his early residence in Philadelphia that he learned the story of the good Pastorius, who, in 1683, left the fatherland and the society of the mystics he loved to lead a colony of Friends to Germantown. The Pilgrim's life in that bountiful valley between the Schuylkill and the Delaware—

> Where, forest-walled, the scattered hamlets lay
> Along the wedded rivers—

offered to Whittier a subject admirably adapted to his powers. Here the faults of taste that elsewhere so often offend us are sunk in the harmony of the whole and in the singular unity of impression; and the lack of elevation that so often stints

our praise becomes a suave and mellow beauty. All the better elements of his genius are displayed here in opulent freedom. The affections of the heart unfold in unembittered serenity. The sense of home seclusion is heightened by the presence of the enveloping wilderness, but not disturbed by any harsher contrast. Within is familiar joy and retirement unassailed—not without a touch of humour, as when in the evening, "while his wife put on her look of love's endurance," Pastorius took down his tremendous manuscript—

> And read, in half the languages of man,
> His *Rusca Apium*, which with bees began,
> And through the gamut of creation ran.

(The manuscript still exists; pray heaven it be never published!) Now and then the winter evenings were broken by the coming of some welcome guest—some traveller from the Old World bringing news of fair Von Merlau and the other beloved mystics; some magistrate from the young city,

> Lovely even then
> With its fair women and its stately men
> Gracing the forest court of William Penn;

or some neighbour of the country, the learned Swedish pastor who, like Pastorius, "could baffle Babel's lingual curse,"

> Or painful Kelpius, from his forest den
> By Wissahickon, maddest of good men.

Such was the life within, and out of doors were the labours of the gardener and botanist, while

> the seasons went
> Their rounds, and somewhat to his spirit lent
> Of their own calm and measureless content.

The scene calls forth some of Whittier's most perfect lines of description. Could anything be more harmonious than this, with its economy of simple grace,

> Slow, overhead, the dusky night-birds sailed?

No poem would be thoroughly charcteristic of Whittier without some echo of the slavery dispute, and our first introduction to Pastorius is, indeed, as to a baffled forerunner of John Woolman. But the question here takes on its most human and least political form; it lets in just enough of the outside world of action to save the idyl from unreality. Nor could religion well be absent; rather, the whole poem may be called an illustration through the Pilgrim's life of that Inner Guide, speaking to him not with loud and controversial tones, as it spoke to George Fox, but with the still, small voice of comfortable persuasion:

> A Voice spake in his ear,
> And lo! all other voices far and near
> Died at that whisper, full of meanings clear.

> The Light of Life shone round him; one by one
> The wandering lights, that all misleading run,
> Went out like candles paling in the sun.

The account of the grave Friends, unsummoned by bells, walking meeting-ward, and of the gathered stillness of the room into which only the songs of the birds penetrated from without, is one of the happiest passages of the poem. How dear those hours of common worship were to Whittier may be understood from another poem, addressed to a visitor who asked him why he did not seek rather the grander temple of nature:

> But nature is not solitude;
> She crowds us with her thronging wood;
> Her many hands reach out to us,
> Her many tongues are garrulous;
> Perpetual riddles of surprise
> She offers to our ears and eyes.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And so I find it well to come
> For deeper rest to this still room,
> For here the habit of the soul
> Feels less the outer world's control;
> The strength of mutual purpose pleads
> More earnestly our common needs;
> And from the silence multiplied
> By these still forms on every side,
> The world that time and sense have known
> Falls off and leaves us God alone.

For the dinner given to Whittier on his seventieth birthday Longfellow wrote a sonnet on *The*

Three Silences of Molinos—the silence of speech, of desire, and of thought, through which are heard "mysterious sounds from realms beyond our reach." Perhaps only one who at some time in his life has caught, or seemed to catch, those voices and melodies is quite able to appreciate the charm of Whittier through the absence of so much that calls to us in other poets.

THE CENTENARY OF SAINTE-BEUVE

It is a hundred years since Sainte-Beuve was born in the Norman city that looks over toward England, and more than a generation has passed since his death just before the war with Germany.[1] Yesterday three countries—France, Belgium, and Switzerland—were celebrating his centenary with speeches and essays and dinners, and the singing of hymns. At Lausanne, where he had given his lectures on *Port-Royal*, and had undergone not a little chagrin for his pains, the University unveiled a bronze medallion of his head,—a Sainte-Beuve disillusioned and complex, writes a Parisian journalist, with immoderate forehead radiating a cold serenity, while the lips are contracted into a smile at once voluptuous and sarcastic, as it were an Erasmus grown fat, with a reminiscence of Baudelaire in the ironic mask of the face. It is evidently the "Père Beuve" as we know him in the portraits, and it is not hard to imagine the lips curling a little more sardonically at the thought of the change that has come since he was a poverty-

[1] Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve was born at Boulogne-sur-Mer, December 23, 1804, and died at Paris, October 13, 1869.

stricken hack and his foibles were the ridicule of Paris.

Yet through all these honours I cannot help observing a strain of reluctance, as so often happens with a critic who has made himself feared by the rectitude of his judgments. There has, for one thing, been a good deal of rather foolish scandal-mongering and raking up of old anecdotes about his gross habits. Well, Sainte-Beuve was sensual. "Je suis du peuple ainsi que mes amours," he was wont to hum over his work; and when that work was finished, his secretary tells us how he used to draw a hat down over his face (that face *dont le front démesurément haut rayonne de sérénité froide*), and go out on the street for any chance liaison. There is something too much of these stories in what is written of Sainte-Beuve to-day; and in the estimate of his intellectual career too little emphasis is laid on what was stable in his opinions, and too much emphasis on the changes of his religious and literary creed. To be sure, these mutations of belief are commonly cited as his preparation for the art of critic, and in a certain sense this is right. But even then, if by critic is meant one who merely decides the value of this or that book, the essential word is left unsaid. He was a critic, and something more; he was, if any man may claim such a title, the *maître universel* of the century, as, indeed, he has been called.

And the time of his life contributed as much to

this position of Doctor Universalis as did his own intelligence. France, during those years from the Revolution of 1830 to the fall of the Second Empire, was the seething-pot of modern ideas, and the impression left by the history of the period is not unlike that of watching the witch scenes in *Macbeth*. The eighteenth century had been earnest, mad in part, but its intention was comparatively single,— to tear down the fabric of authority, whether political or religious, and allow human nature, which was fundamentally good, though depraved by custom, to assert itself. And human nature did assert itself pretty vigorously in the French Revolution, proving, one might suppose, if it proved anything, that its foundation, like its origin, is with the beasts. To the men who came afterward that tremendous event stood like a great prism between themselves and the preceding age; the pillar of light toward which they looked for guidance was distorted by it and shattered into a thousand coloured rays. For many of them, as for Sainte-Beuve, it meant that the old humanitarian passion remained side by side with a profound distrust of the popular heart; for all, the path of reform took the direction of some individual caprice or ideal. There were democrats and monarchists and imperialists; there was the rigid Catholic reaction led by Bonald and de Maistre, and the liberal Catholicism of Lamennais; there was the socialism of Saint-Simon, mixed with notions of a religious hierarchy, and

other schemes of socialism innumerable; while skepticism took every form of condescension or antagonism. Literature also had its serious mission, and the battle of the romanticists shook Paris almost as violently as a political revolution. Through it all science was marching with steady gaze, waiting for the hour when it should lay its cold hand on the heart of society.

And with all these movements Sainte-Beuve was more or less intimately concerned. As a boy he brought with him to Paris the pietistic sentiments of his mother and an aunt on whom, his father being dead, his training had devolved. Upon these sentiments he soon imposed the philosophy of the eighteenth century, followed by a close study of the Revolution. It is noteworthy that his first journalistic work on the *Globe* was a literary description of the places in Greece to which the war for independence was calling attention, and the reviewing of various memoirs of the French Revolution. From these influences he passed to the *cénacle* of Victor Hugo, and became one of the champions of the new romantic school. Meanwhile literature was mingled with romance of another sort, and the story of the critic's friendship for the haughty poet and of his love for the poet's wife is of a kind almost incomprehensible to the Anglo-Saxon mind. It may be said in passing that the letters of Sainte-Beuve to M. and Mme. Hugo, which have only to-day been recovered and published in the *Revue de Paris*,

throw rather a new light on this whole affair. They do not exculpate Sainte-Beuve, but they at least free him from ridicule. His successful passion for Mme. Hugo, with its abrupt close when Mme. Hugo's daughter came to her first confession, and his tormented courtship of Mme. d'Arbouville in later years, were the chief elements in that *éducation sentimentale* which made him so cunning in the secrets of the feminine breast.

But this is a digression. Personal and critical causes carried him out of the camp of Victor Hugo into the ranks of the Saint-Simonians, whom he followed for a while with a kind of half-detached enthusiasm. Probably he was less attracted by the hopes of a mystically regenerated society, with Enfantin as its supreme pontiff, than by the desire of finding some rest for the imagination in this religion of universal love. At least he perceived in the new brotherhood a relief from the strained individualism of the romantic poets, and the same instinct, no doubt, followed him from Saint-Simonism into the fold of Lamennais. There at last he thought to see united the ideals of religion and democracy, and some of the bitterest words he ever wrote were in memory of the final defalcation of Lamennais, who, as Sainte-Beuve said, saved himself but left his disciples stranded in the mire. Meanwhile this particular disciple had met new friends in Switzerland, and through their aid was brought at a critical moment to Lausanne to lecture on *Port-Royal*. There he

learned to know and respect Vinet, the Protestant theologian and critic, who, with the help of his good friends the Oliviers, undertook to convert the wily Parisian to Calvinism. Saint-Beuve himself seems to have gone into the discussion quite earnestly, but for one who knows the past experiences of that subtle twister there is something almost ludicrous in the way these anxious missionaries reported each accession and retrogression of his faith. He came back to Paris a confirmed and satisfied doubter, willing to sacrifice to the goddess Chance as the blind deity of this world, convinced of materialism and of the essential baseness of human nature, yet equally convinced that within man there rules some ultimate principle of genius or individual authority which no rationalism can explain, and above all things determined to keep his mind open to whatever currents of truth may blow through our murky human atmosphere. He ended where he began, in what may be called a subtilised and refined philosophy of the eighteenth century, with a strain of melancholy quite peculiar to the baffled experience of the nineteenth. His aim henceforth was to apply to the study of mankind the analytical precision of science, with a scientific method of grouping men into spiritual families.

Much has been made of these varied twistings of Sainte-Beuve's, both for his honour and dishonour. Certainly they enabled him to insinuate himself into almost every kind of intelligence and

report of each author as if he were writing out a phase of his own character; they made him in the end the spokesman of that eager and troubled age whose ferment is to-day just reaching America. France scarcely holds the place of intellectual supremacy once universally accorded her, yet to her glory be it said that, if we look anywhere for a single man who summed up within himself the life of the nineteenth century, we instinctively turn to that country. And more and more it appears that to Sainte-Beuve in particular that honour must accrue. His understanding was more comprehensive than Taine's or Renan's, more subtle than that of the former, more upright than that of the latter, more single toward the truth and more accurate than that of either. He never, as did Taine, allowed a preconceived idea to warp his arrangement of facts, nor did he ever, at least in his mature years, allow his sentimentality, as did Renan, to take the place of judgment. Both the past and the present are reflected in his essays with equal clearness.

On the other hand, this versatility of experience has not seldom been laid to lightness and inconsistency of character. I cannot see that the charge holds good, unless it be directed also against the whole age through which he passed. If any one thing has been made clear by the publishing of Sainte-Beuve's letters and by the closer investigation of his life, it is that he was in these earlier years a sincere seeker after religion, and

was only held back at the last moment by some invincible impotence of faith from joining himself finally with this or that sect. And he was thus an image of the times. What else is the meaning of all those abortive attempts to amalgamate religion with the humanitarianism left over from the eighteenth century, but a searching for faith where the spiritual eye had been blinded? I should suppose that Sainte-Beuve's refusal in the end to speak the irrevocable word of adhesion indicated rather the clearness of his self-knowledge than any lightness of procedure. Nor is his inconsistency, whether religious or literary, quite so great as it is sometimes held up to be. The inheritance of the eighteenth century was strong upon him, while at the same time he had a craving for the inner life of the spirit. Naturally he felt a powerful attraction in the preaching of such men as Saint-Simon and Lamennais, who boasted to combine these two tendencies; but the mummery of Saint-Simonism and the instability of Mennaisianism, when it came to the test, too soon exposed the lack of spiritual substance in both. With this revelation came a growing distrust of human nature, caused by the political degeneracy of France, and by a kind of revulsion he threw himself upon the Jansenism which contained the spirituality the other creeds missed, and which based itself frankly on the total depravity of mankind. He was too much a child of the age to breathe in that thin air, and fell back

on all that remained to him,—inquisitive doubt and a scientific demand for positive truth. It is the history of the century.

And in literature I find the same inconstancy on the surface, while at heart he suffered little change. Only here his experience ran counter to the times, and most of the opprobrium that has been cast on him is due to the fact that he never allowed the clamour of popular taste and the warmth of his sympathy with present modes to drown that inner critical voice of doubt. As a standard-bearer of Victor Hugo and the romanticists he still maintained his reserves, and, on the other hand, long after he had turned renegade from that camp he still spoke of himself as only *demi-converti*. The proportion changed with his development, but from beginning to end he was at bottom classical in his love of clarity and self-restraint, while intensely interested in the life and aspirations of his own day. There is in one of the recently published letters to Victor Hugo a noteworthy illustration of this steadfastness. It was, in fact, the second letter he wrote to the poet, and goes back to 1827, the year of *Cromwell*. On the twelfth of February, Hugo read his new tragi-comedy aloud, and Sainte-Beuve was evidently warm in expressions of praise. But in the seclusion of his own room the critical instinct reawoke in him, and he wrote the next day a long letter to the dramatist, not retracting what he had said, but adding certain reservations and insinu-

ating certain admonitions. "Toutes ces critiques rentrent dans une seule que je m'étais déjà permis d'adresser à votre talent, l'excès, l'abus de la *force*, et passez-moi le mot, la *charge*." Is not the whole of his critical attitude toward the men of his age practically contained in this rebuke of excess, and over-emphasis, and self-indulgence? And Sainte-Beuve when he wrote the words was just twenty-three, was in the first ardour of his attachment to the giant—the Cyclops, he seemed to Sainte-Beuve later—of the century.

But after all, it is not the elusive seeker of these years that we think of when Sainte-Beuve is named, nor the author of those many volumes,—the *Portraits*, the *Chateaubriand*, even the *Port-Royal*,—but the writer of the incomparable *Lundis*. In 1849 he had returned from Liège after lecturing for a year at the University, and found himself abounding in ideas, keen for work, and without regular employment. He was asked to contribute a critical essay to the *Constitutionnel* each Monday, and accepted the offer eagerly. "It is now twenty-five years," he said, "since I started in this career; it is the third form in which I have been brought to give out my impressions and literary judgments." These first *Causeries* continued until 1860, and are published in fourteen solid volumes. There was a brief respite then, and in 1861 he began the *Nouveaux Lundis*, which continued in the *Moniteur* and the *Temps* until his last illness in 1869, filling thirteen

similar volumes. Meanwhile his mother had died, leaving him a house in Paris and a small income, and in 1865 he had been created a senator by Napoleon III. at the instigation of the Princesse Mathilde.

In his earlier years he had been poor and anxious, living in a student's room, and toiling indefatigably to keep the wolf from the door. At the end he was rich, and had command of his time, yet the story of his labours while writing the latest *Lundis* is one of the heroic examples of literature. "Every Tuesday morning," he once wrote to a friend, "I go down to the bottom of a pit, not to reascend until Friday evening at some unknown hour." Those were the days of preparation and plotting. From his friend M. Chéron, who was librarian of the Bibliothèque Impériale, came memoirs and histories and manuscripts,—whatever might serve him in getting up his subject. Late in the week he wrote a rough draft of the essay, commonly about six thousand words long, in a hand which no one but himself could decipher. This task was ordinarily finished in a single day, and the essay was then dictated off rapidly to a secretary to take down in a fair copy. That must have been a strenuous season for the copyist, for Sainte-Beuve read at a prodigious rate, showing impatience at any delay, and still greater impatience at any proposed alteration. Indeed, during the whole week of preparation he was so absorbed in his theme as to ruffle up at the

slightest opposition. In the evening he would eat a hearty dinner, and then walk out with his secretary to the outer Boulevards, the Luxembourg, or the Place Saint-Sulpice, for his digestion, talking all the while on the coming *Lundi* with intense absorption. And woe to the poor companion if he expressed any contradiction, or hinted that the subject was trivial,—as indeed it often was, until the critic had clothed it with the life of his own thought. "In a word," Sainte-Beuve would cry out savagely, "you wish to hinder me in writing my article. The subject has not the honour of your sympathy. Really it is too bad." Whereupon he would turn angrily on his heel and stride home. The story explains the nature of Sainte-Beuve's criticism. For a week he lived with his author; "he belonged body and soul to his model! He embraced it, espoused it, exalted it!"—with the result that some of this enthusiasm is transmitted to the reader, and the essays are instinct with life as no other critic's work has ever been. The strain of living thus passionately in a new subject week after week was tremendous, and it is not strange that his letters are filled with complaints of fatigue, and that his health suffered in spite of his robust constitution. Nor was the task ended with the dictation late Friday night. Most of Saturday and Sunday was given up to proofreading, and at this time he invited every suggestion, even contradiction, often practically rewriting an essay

before it reached the press. Monday he was free, and it was on that day occurred the famous Magny dinners, when Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert, Renan, the Goncourts, and a few other chosen spirits, met and talked as only Frenchmen can talk. Every conceivable subject was passed under the fire of criticism; nothing was held sacred. Only one day a luckless guest, after faith in religion and politics and morals had been laughed away, ventured to intimate that Homer as a canon of taste was merely a superstition like another; whereupon such a hubbub arose as threatened to bring the dinners to an end at once and for all. The story is told in the *Journal* of the Goncourts, and it was one of the brothers, I believe, who made the perilous insinuation. Imagine, if you can, a party of Englishmen taking Homer, or any other question of literary faith, with tragic seriousness. Such an incident explains many things; it explains why English literature has never been, like the French, an integral part of the national life.

And the integrity of mind displayed in the *Lundis* is as notable as the industry. From the beginning Sainte-Beuve had possessed that inquisitive passion for the truth, without which all other critical gifts are as brass and tinkling cymbals. Nevertheless, it is evident that he did not always in his earlier writings find it expedient to express his whole thought. He was, for example, at one time the recognised herald of the romantic revolt, and naturally, while writing about Victor

Hugo, he did not feel it necessary to make in public such frank reservations as his letters to that poet contain. His whole thought is there, perhaps, but one has to read between the lines to get it. And so it was with the other men and movements with which he for a while allied himself. With the *Lundis* came a change; he was free of all entanglements, and could make the precise truth his single aim. No doubt a remnant of personal jealousy toward those who had passed him in the race of popularity embittered the critical reservations which he felt, but which might otherwise have been uttered more genially. But quite as often this seeming rancour was due to the feeling that he had hitherto been compelled to suppress his full convictions, to a genuine regret for the corrupt ways into which French literature was deviating. How nearly the exigencies of a hack writer had touched him is shown by a passage in a letter to the Oliviers written in 1838. His Swiss friend was debating whether he should try his fortunes in Paris as a contributor to the magazines, and had asked for advice. "But where to write? what to write?" replied Sainte-Beuve; "if one could only choose for himself! You must wait on opportunity, and in the long run this becomes a transaction in which conscience may be saved, but every ideal perishes," —*dans laquelle la conscience peut toujours être sauve mais où tout idéal périt.* Just about this time he was thinking seriously of migrating with the

Oliviers to this country. It would be curious to hear what he might have written from New York to one who contemplated coming there as a hack writer. As for the loss of ideals, his meaning, if it needs any elucidation, may be gathered from a well-known passage in one of his books:

> The condition of man ordinarily is no more than a succession of servitudes, and the only liberty that remains is now and then to effect a change. Labour presses, necessity commands, circumstances sweep us along: at the risk of seeming to contradict ourselves or give ourselves the lie, we must go on and for ever recommence; we must accept whatever employments are offered, and even though we fill them with all conscientiousness and zeal we raise a dust on the way, we obscure the images of the past, we soil and mar our own selves. And so it is that before the goal of old age is reached, we have passed through so many lives that scarcely, as we go back in memory, can we tell which was our true life, that for which we were made and of which we were worthy, the life which we would have chosen.

Those were the words with which he had closed his chapters on *Chateaubriand;* yet through all his deviations he had borne steadily toward one point. In after years he could write without presumption to a friend: "If I had a device, it would be the *true*, the *true* alone; and the beautiful and the good might come out as best they could." There are a number of anecdotes which show how precious he held this integrity of mind. The best known is the fact that, in the days before he was appointed senator, and despite the pressure that

was brought to bear on him, he still refused to write a review of the Emperor's *History of Cæsar*.

Both the sense of disillusion, which was really inherent in him from his youth, and the passion for truth hindered him in his "creative" work, while they increased his powers as a critic. He grew up, it must be remembered, in the midst of the full romantic tide, and as a writer of verse there was really no path of great achievement open to him save that of Victor Hugo and Lamartine and the others of whose glory he was so jealous. Whatever may have been the differences of those poets, in one respect they were alike: they all disregarded the subtle *nuance* wherein the truth resides, and based their emotions on some grandiose conception, half true and half false; nor was this mingling of the false and true any less predominant in one of Hugo's political odes than in Lamartine's personal and religious meditations. Now, the whole bent of Sainte-Beuve's intellect was toward the subtle drawing of distinctions, and even to-day a reader somewhat romantically and emotionally inclined resents the manner in which his scalpel cuts into the work of these poets and severs what is morbid from what is sound. That is criticism; but it may easily be seen that such a habit of mind when carried to excess would paralyse the poetic impulse. The finest poetry, perhaps, is written when this discriminating principle works in the writer strongly but unconsciously; when a

certain critical atmosphere about him controls his taste, while not compelling him to dull the edge of impulse by too much deliberation. Boileau had created such an atmosphere about Molière and Racine; Sainte-Beuve had attempted, but unsuccessfully, to do the same for the poets of the romantic renaissance. His failure was due in part to a certain lack of impressiveness in his own personality, but still more to the notions of individual licence which lay at the very foundation of that movement. There is a touch of real pathos in his superb tribute to Boileau:

Let us salute and acknowledge to-day the noble and mighty harmony of the *grand siècle*. Without Boileau, and without Louis XIV., who recognised Boileau as his Superintendent of Parnassus, what would have happened? Would even the most talented have produced in the same degree what forms their surest heritage of glory? Racine, I fear, would have made more plays like *Bérénice;* La Fontaine fewer *Fables* and more *Contes;* Molière himself would have run to *Scapins*, and might not have attained to the austere eminence of *Le Misanthrope*. In a word, each of these fair geniuses would have abounded in his natural defects. Boileau, that is to say, the common sense of the poet-critic authorised and confirmed by that of a great king, constrained them and kept them, by the respect for his presence, to their better and graver tasks. And do you know what, in our days, has failed our poets, so strong at their beginning in native ability, so filled with promise and happy inspiration? There failed them a Boileau and an enlightened monarch, the twain supporting and consecrating each other. So it is these men of talent, seeing themselves in an age of

anarchy and without discipline, have not hesitated to behave accordingly; they have behaved, to be perfectly frank, not like exalted geniuses, or even like men, but like schoolboys out of school. We have seen the result.

Nobler tribute to a great predecessor has not often been uttered, and in contrast one remembers the outrage that has been poured on Boileau's name by the later poets of France and England. One recalls the scorn of the young Keats, in those days when he took licence upon himself to abuse the King's English as only a wilful genius can:

> Ill-fated, impious race!
> That blasphemed the bright Lyrist face to face,
> And did not know it,—no, they went about,
> Holding a poor decrepit standard out
> Marked with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
> The name of one Boileau!

I am not one to fling abuse on the school of Dryden and Pope, yet the eighteenth century may to some minds justify the charge of Keats and the romanticists. Certainly the critical restraint of French rules, passing to England at a time when the tide of inspiration had run low, induced a certain aridity of manner. But consider for a moment what might have been the result in English letters if the court of Elizabeth had harboured a man of authority such as Boileau, or, to put it the other way, if the large inspiration of those poets and playwrights had not come before the critical sense of the land was out of its swaddling clothes. What might it have been for us if

a Boileau and an Elizabeth together had taught Shakespeare to prune his redundancies, to disentangle his language at times, to eliminate the relics of barbarism in his dénouements; if they had compelled the lesser dramatists to simplify their plots and render their characters conceivable moral agents; if they had instructed the sonneteers in common sense and in the laws of the sonnet; if they had constrained Spenser to tell a story,—consider what this might have meant, not only to the writers of that day, but to the tradition they formed for those that were to come after. We should have had our own classics, and not been forced to turn to Athens for our canons of taste. There would not have been for our confusion the miserable contrast between the "correctness" of Queen Anne's day and the creative genius of Elizabeth's, but the two together would have made a literature incomparable for richness and judgment. It is not too much to say that the absence of such a controlling influence at the great expansive moment of England is a loss for which nothing can ever entirely compensate in our literature.

Such was the office which Sainte-Beuve sought to fulfil in the France of his own day. That conscious principle of restraint might, he thought, when applied to his own poetical work, introduce into French literature a style like that of Cowper's or Wordsworth's in England; and to a certain extent he was successful in this attempt. But in

the end he found the Democritean maxim too strong for him: *Excludit sanos Helicone poetas;* and, indeed, the difference between the poet and the critic may scarcely be better defined than in this, that in the former the principle of restraint works unconsciously and from without, whereas in the latter it proceeds consciously and from within. And finding himself debarred from Helicon (not by impotence, as some would say, but by excess of self-knowledge), he deliberately undertook to introduce a little more sanity into the notions of his contemporaries. I have shown how at the very beginning of his career he took upon himself privately such a task with Hugo. It might almost be said that the history of his intellect is summed up in his growth toward the sane and the simple; that, like Goethe, from whom so much of his critical method derives, his life was a long endeavour to supplant the romantic elements of his taste by the classical. What else is the meaning of his attack on the excesses of Balzac? or his defence of Erasmus (*le droit, je ne dis des tièdes, mais des neutres*), and of all those others who sought for themselves a governance in the law of proportion? In one of his latest volumes he took the occasion of Taine's *History of English Literature* to speak out strongly for the admirable qualities of Pope:

> I insist on this because the danger to-day is in the sacrifice of the writers and poets whom I will call the moderate. For a long time they had all the honours: one

pleaded for Shakespeare, for Milton, for Dante, even for Homer; no one thought it necessary to plead for Virgil, for Horace, for Boileau, Racine, Voltaire, Pope, Tasso,—these were accepted and recognised by all. To-day the first have completely gained their cause, and matters are quite the other way about: the great and primitive geniuses reign and triumph; even those who come after them in invention, but are still naïve and original in thought and expression, poets such as Regnier and Lucretius, are raised to their proper rank; while the moderate, the cultured, the polished, those who were the classics to our fathers, we tend to make subordinate, and, if we are not careful, to treat a little too cavalierly. Something like disdain and contempt (relatively speaking) will soon be their portion. It seems to me that there is room for all, and that none need be sacrificed. Let us render full homage and complete reverence to those great human forces which are like the powers of nature, and which like them burst forth with something of strangeness and harshness; but still let us not cease to honour those other forces which are more restrained, and which, in their less explosive expression, clothe themselves with elegance and sweetness.

And this love of the golden mean, joined with the long wanderings of his heart and his loneliness, produced in him a preference for scenes near at hand and for the quiet joys of the hearth. So it was that the idyllic tales of George Sand touched him quickly with their strange romance of the familiar. Chateaubriand and the others of that school had sought out the nature of India, the savannahs of America, the forests of Canada. "Here," he says, "are discoveries for you,—

deserts, mountains, the large horizons of Italy; what remained to discover? That which was nearest to us, here in the centre of our own France. As happens always, what is most simple comes at the last." In the same way he praised the refined charm of a poet like Cowper, and sought to throw into relief the purer and more homely verses of a Parny: "If a little knowledge removes us, yet greater knowledge brings us back to the sentiment of the beauties and graces of the hearth." Indeed, there is something almost pathetic in the contrast between the life of this laborious recluse, with his sinister distrust of human nature, and the way in which he fondles this image of a sheltered and affectionate home.

But the nineteenth century was not the seventeenth, neither was Sainte-Beuve a Boileau, to stem the current of exaggeration and egotism. His innate sense of proportion brought him to see the dangerous tendencies of the day, and, failing to correct them, he sank deeper into that disillusion from which his weekly task was a long and vain labour of deliverance. He took to himself the saying of the Abbé Galiani: "Continue your works; it is a proof of attachment to life to compose books." Yet it may be that this very disillusion was one of the elements of his success; for after all, the real passion of literature, that perfect flower of the contemplative intellect, hardly comes to a man until the allurement of life has been dispelled by many experiences, each

bringing its share of disappointment. Only, perhaps, when the hope of love (the *spes animi credula mutui*) and the visions of ambition, the belief in pleasure and the luxury of grief, have lost their sting, do we turn to books with the contented understanding that the shadow is the reality, and the seeming reality of things is the shadow. At least for the critic, however it may be for the "creative" writer, this final deliverance from self-deception would seem to be necessary. Nor do I mean any invidious distinction when I separate the critic from the creative writer in this respect. I know there is a kind of hostility between the two classes. The poet feels that the critic by the very possession of this self-knowledge sets himself above the writer who accepts the inspiration of his emotions unquestioningly, while the critic resents the fact that the world at large looks upon his work as subordinate, if not superfluous. And yet, in the case of criticism, such as Sainte-Beuve conceived it, this distinction almost ceases to exist. No stigma attaches to the work of the historian who recreates the political activities of an age, to a Gibbon who raises a vast bridge between the past and the present. Yet, certainly, the best and most durable acts of mankind are the ideals and emotions that go to make up its books, and to describe and judge the literature of a country, to pass under review a thousand systems and reveries, to point out the meaning of each, and so write the annals of the human spirit,

to pluck out the heart of each man's mystery and set it before the mind's eye quivering with life,—if this be not a labour of immense creative energy the word has no sense to my ears. We read and enjoy, and the past slips unceasingly from our memory. We are like the foolish peasant: the river of history rolls at our feet, and for ever will roll, while we stand and wait. And then comes this magician, who speaks a word, and suddenly the current is stopped; who has power like the wizards of old to bid the tide turn back upon itself, and the past becomes to us as the present, and we are made the lords of time. I do not know how it affects others, but for me, as I look at the long row of volumes which hold the interpretation of French literature, I am almost overwhelmed at the magnitude of this man's achievement.

Nor is it to be supposed that Sainte-Beuve, because he was primarily a critic, drew his knowledge of life from books only, and wrote, as it were, at second hand. The very contrary is true. As a younger man, he had mixed much with society, and even in his later years, when, as he says, he lived at the bottom of a well, he still, through his friendship with the Princesse Mathilde and others of the great world, kept in close touch with the active forces of the Empire. As a matter of fact, every one knows, who has read at all in his essays, that he was first of all a psychologist, and that his knowledge of the

human breast was quite as sure as his acquaintance with libraries. He might almost be accused of slighting the written word in order to get at the secret of the writer. What attracted him chiefly was that middle ground where life and literature meet, where life becomes self-conscious through expression, and literature retains the reality of association with facts. "A little poesy," he thought, "separates us from history and the reality of things; much of poesy brings us back." Literature to him was one of the arts of society. Hence he was never more at his ease, his touch was never surer and his eloquence more communicable, than when he was dealing with the great ladies who guided the society of the eighteenth century and retold its events in their letters and memoirs,—Mme. du Deffand, Mme. de Grafigny, Mlle. de Lespinasse, and those who preceded and followed. Nowhere does one get closer to the critic's own disappointment than when he says with a sigh, thinking of those irrecoverable days: "Happy time! all of life then was turned to sociability." And he was describing his own method as a critic, no less than the character of Mlle. de Lespinasse, when he wrote: "Her great art in society, one of the secrets of her success, was to feel the intelligence (*l'esprit*) of others, to make it prevail, and to seem to forget her own. Her conversation was never either above or below those with whom she spoke; she possessed measure, proportion, rightness of mind.

She reflected so well the impressions of others, and received so visibly the influence of their intelligence, that they loved her for the success she helped them to attain. She raised this disposition to an art. 'Ah!' she cried one day, 'how I long to know the foible of every one!'" And this love of the social side of literature, this hankering after *la bella scuola* when men wrote under the sway of some central governance, explains Sainte-Beuve's feeling of desolation amidst the scattered, individualistic tendencies of his own day.

There lie the springs of Sainte-Beuve's critical art,—his treatment of literature as a function of social life, and his search in all things for the golden mean. There we find his strength, and there, too, his limitation. If he fails anywhere, it is when he comes into the presence of those great and imperious souls who stand apart from the common concerns of men, and who rise above our homely mediocrities, not by extravagance or egotism, but by the lifting wings of inspiration. He could, indeed, comprehend the ascetic grandeur of a Pascal or the rolling eloquence of a Bossuet, but he was distrustful of that fervid breath of poesy that comes and goes unsummoned and uncontrolled. It is a common charge against him that he was cold to the sublime, and he himself was aware of this defect, and sought to justify it. "Il ne faut donner dans le sublime," he said, "qu'à la dernière extrémité et à son corps défendant." Something of this, too, must be held to account

for the haunting melancholy that he could forget, but never overcome. He might have lived with a kind of content in the society of those refined and worldly women of the eighteenth century, but, missing the solace of that support, he was unable amid the dissipated energies of his own age to rise to that surer peace that needs no communion with others for its fulfilment. Like the royal friend of Voltaire, he still lacked the highest degree of culture, which is religion. He strove for that during many years, but alone he could not attain to it. As early as 1839 he wrote, while staying at Aigues-Mortes: "My soul is like this beach, where it is said Saint Louis embarked: the sea and faith, alas! have long since drawn away." One may excuse these limitations as the "defect of his quality," as indeed they are. But more than that, they belong to him as a French critic, as they are to a certain degree inherent in French literature. That literature and language, we have been told by no less an authority than M. Brunetière, are pre-eminently social in their strength and their weakness. And Sainte-Beuve was indirectly justifying his own method when he pointed to the example of Voltaire, Molière, La Fontaine, and Rabelais and Villon, the great ancestors. "They have all," he said, "a corner from which they mock at the sublime." I am even inclined to think that these qualities explain why England has never had, and may possibly never have, a critic in any way comparable to

Sainte-Beuve; for the chief glory of English literature lies in the very field where French is weakest, in the lonely and unsociable life of the spirit, just as the faults of English are due to its lack of discipline and uncertainty of taste. And after all, the critical temperament consists primarily in just this linking together of literature and life, and in the levelling application of common sense.

Yet if Sainte-Beuve is essentially French, indeed almost inconceivable in English, he is still immensely valuable, perhaps even more valuable, to us for that very reason. There is nothing more wholesome than to dip into this strong and steady current of wise judgment. It is good for us to catch the glow of his masterful knowledge of letters and his faith in their supreme interest. His long row of volumes are the scholar's Summa Theologiæ. As John Cotton loved to sweeten his mouth with a piece of Calvin before he went to sleep, so the scholar may turn to Sainte-Beuve, sure of his never-failing abundance and his ripe intelligence.

THE SCOTCH NOVELS AND SCOTCH HISTORY

LIKE many another innocent, no doubt, I was seduced not long ago by the potent spell of Mr. Andrew Lang's name into reading his voluminous *History of Scotland*. Being too, like Mr. Lang, sealed of the tribe of Sir Walter, and knowing in a general way some of the romantic features of Scotch annals, I was led to suppose that these bulky volumes would be crammed from cover to cover with the pageantry of fair Romance. Alas, I soon learned, as I have so often learned before, that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing; and I was taught, moreover, a new application of several well-worn lines of Milton. Amid the inextricable feuds of Britons, Scots, Picts, and English; amid the incomprehensible medley of Bruces, Balliols, Stuarts, Douglases, Plantagenets, and Tudors; amid the horrid tumult of Roberts, Davids, Jameses, Malcolms (may their tribes decrease!), Mr. Lang's reader, if he be of alien blood and foreign shores, wanders helpless and utterly bewildered. On leaving that *selva oscura* I felt not unlike Milton's courageous hero (in courage only, I trust) before the realm of Chaos and eldest Night, where naught was perceptible but eternal

anarchy and noise of endless wars. Yet with this bold adventurer it might be said by me:

> I come no spy,
> With purpose to explore or to disturb
> The secrets of your realm ; but by constraint
> Wandering this darksome desert, as my way
> Led through your spacious empire up to light.

For throughout the labyrinth of all this anfractuous narrative there was indeed one guiding ray of light. As often as the author by way of anecdote or allusion—and happily this occured pretty frequently—mentioned the works of Scott, a new and powerful interest was given to the page. The very name of Scott seemed providentially symbolical of his office in literature, and through him Scots history has become a theme of significance to all the world.

On the other hand, one is equally impressed by the fact that the novels owe much of their vitality to the manner in which they voice the spirit of the national life; and we recognise the truth, often maintained and as often disputed, that the final verdict on a novelist's work is generally determined by the authenticity of his portraiture, not of individuals, but of a people, and consequently by the lasting significance of the phase of society or national life portrayed.

The conditions of the novel should seem in this respect to be quite different from those of the poem. We are conscious within ourselves of some

principle of isolation and exclusion—the *principium individuationis*, as the old schoolmen called it—that obstructs the completion of our being, of some contracting force of nature that dwarfs our sympathies with our fellow-men, that hinders the development of our full humanity, and denies the validity of our hopes; and the office of the imagination and of the imaginative arts is for a while to break down the walls of this narrowing individuality and to bestow on us the illusion of unconfined liberty.

But if the end of the arts is the same, their methods are various, and this variety extends even to the different genres of literature. The manner of the epic, and in a still higher degree of the tragedy, is so to arouse the will and understanding that their clogging limitations seem to be swept away, until through our sympathy with the hero we feel ourselves to be acting and speaking the great passions of humanity in their fullest and freest scope; for this reason we call the characters of the poem types, and we believe that the poet under the impulse of his inspiration is carried into a region above our vision, where, like the exalted souls in Plato's dream, he beholds face to face the great ideas of which our worldly life and circumstances are but faulty copies. In this way Achilles stands as the perfect warrior, and Odysseus as the enduring man of wiles; Hamlet is the man of doubts, and Satan the creature of rebellious pride. It may be that this effort or inspira-

tion of the poet to represent mankind in idealised form will account in part for the peculiar tinge of melancholy that is commonly an attribute of the artistic temperament,—for the brooding uncertainty of Shakespeare, if as many think Hamlet is the true voice of his heart, for the feeling of baffled despair which led Goethe to create Faust, and for the self-tormenting of Childe Harold. It is because the dissolving power of genius and the personality of the man can never be quite reconciled; he is detached from nature and attached to her at the same time. On the one hand his genius draws him to contemplate life with the disinterestedness of a mind free from the attachments of the individual, while on the other hand his own personality, often of the most ardent character, drags him irresistibly to seek the satisfaction of individual emotions. Like the Empedocles of Matthew Arnold, baffled in the ineffable longing to escape themselves, these bearers of the divine light are haled unwillingly

> Back to this meadow of calamity,
> This uncongenial place, this human life.

What to the reader is merely a pleasant and momentary illusion, or a salutary excitation from without, is in the creative poet a partial dissolution of his own personality. Shakespeare was not dealing in empty words when he likened the poet to the lover and the lunatic as being of imagination all compact; nor was Plato speaking mere

metaphor when he said that "the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses and the mind is no longer in him." In the hour of inspiration some darkened window is opened on the horizon to eyes that are ordinarily confined within the four walls of his meagre self, a door is thrown open to the heaven-sweeping gales, he hears for a brief while the voice of the Over-soul speaking a language that with all his toil he can barely render into human speech;—and when at last the door is closed, the vision gone, and the voice hushed, he sits in the darkened chamber of his own person, silent and forlorn.

I would not presume to describe absolutely the inner state of the poet when life appears to him in its ideal form, but the means by which he conveys his illusion to the reader is quite clear. The rhythm of his verse produces on the mind something of the stimulating effect of music and this effect is enhanced by the use of language and metaphor lifted out of the common mould. Prose, however, has no such resources to impose on the fancy a creation of its own, in which the individual will is raised above itself. On the contrary, the office of the novel—and this we see more clearly as fiction grows regularly more realistic—is to represent life as controlled by environment and to portray human beings as the servants of the flesh. This, I take it, was the meaning of

Goethe in his definition of the genres: "In the novel sentiments and events chiefly are exhibited, in the drama characters and deeds." The procedure of the novel must be, so to speak, a passive one. It depicts man as a creature of circumstance, and its only method of escape is so to encompass the individual in circumstance as to lend to his separate life something of the pomp of universality. It effects its purpose by breadth rather than by exaltation. Its truest aim is not to represent the actions of a single man as noteworthy in themselves, but to represent the life of a people or a phase of society; in the great sweep of human activity something of the same largeness and freedom is produced as in the poetic idealisation of the individual will in the drama. Thus it happens that the artistic validity of a novel depends first of all on the power of the author to portray broadly and veraciously some aspect of this wider existence.

Balzac, in some respects the master novelist, was clearly conscious of this aim of his art; and his *Comédie Humaine* is a supreme effort to grasp the whole range of French society. Nor would it be difficult in the case of the greater English novelists to show that unwittingly—an Englishman rarely if ever has the same knowledge of his art as a Frenchman—they obeyed the same law. We admire Fielding and Smollett not so much for their individual characterisations as for the joy we feel in escaping our conventional timidity in

the old-time tumultuous country life of England, with all its rude strength and even its vulgarity. By a natural contrast we read Jane Austen for her picture of rural security and stability, and are glad to forget the vexations and uncertainties of life's warfare in that gentle round of society, where greed and passion are reduced to petty foibles, and where the errors of mankind only furnish material for malicious but innocent satire. With Thackeray we put on the veneer of artificial society which was the true idealism inherited by him from the eighteenth century; and we move more freely amidst that *gai monde* because there runs through the story of it such a biting satire of worldliness and snobbishness as flatters us with the feeling of our own superiority. In Dickens we are carried into the very opposite field of life, and for a while we move with those who are the creatures of grotesque whims and emotions: caricatures we call his people, but deep in our hearts we know that each of us longs at times to be as humanity is in Dickens's world, the perfect and unreflecting creature of his dearest whim—for this too is liberty. Thus it is that the interest of the novel depends as much, or almost as much, on the intrinsic value of the national life or phase of society reproduced as on the skill of the writer. The prose author is in this respect far less a free agent than the poet and far more the subject of his environment; for he deals less with the unchanging laws of character and more with what

he perceives outwardly about him. It is this fact which leads many readers to prefer the English novelists to the French, although the latter are unquestionably the greater masters of their craft.

Now the peculiar good fortune of Scott in this matter was most strongly brought home to me in reading the narrative work of Mr. Lang. Fine and entertaining as are Scott's more professedly historical novels, such as *Ivanhoe* and *Quentin Durward*, I do not believe they could ever have resisted the invasion of time were they not bolstered up by the stories that deal more directly with the realities of Scotch life. There is, to be sure, in the foreign tales a wonderfully pure vein of romance; but romantic writing in prose cannot endure unless firmly grounded in realism, or unless, like Hawthorne's work, it is surcharged with spiritual meanings. Not having the power possessed by verse to convey illusion, it lacks also the vitality of verse. Younger readers may take naturally to *Ivanhoe* or *The Talisman*, because very little is required to evoke illusion with them. More mature readers turn oftenest to *Guy Mannering* and those tales in which the romance is the realism of Scotch life, finding here a fulness of interest that is more than a compensation for the frequent slovenliness of Scott's language and for the haphazard construction of his plots.

These negligences of the indifferent craftsman might, perhaps, need no such compensation, for

we have grown hardened at last to slovenliness in fiction. But there are other limitations to Scott's powers that show more clearly how much of his fame rests on the substratum of national life on which he builds. An infinite variety of characters, from kings in the council hall down to strolling half-witted gaberlunzies, move through the pages of his novels; but, and the fact is notorious, the great Scotchman was little better at painting the purple light of young desire than was our own Cooper. There is something like love-making in *Rob Roy*, and Di Vernon has been signalised by Mr. Saintsbury as one of his five chosen heroines; but in general the scenes that form the ecstasy of most romance are dead and perfunctory in Scott. And this is the more remarkable since we know that he himself was a lover—and a disappointed lover, which is vastly more to the point in art, as all the world knows. But in fact this inability to portray the softer emotions is not an isolated phenomenon in Scott; he skims very lightly over most of the deeper passions of the heart, seeming to avoid them except in so far as they express themselves in action. His novels contain no adequate picture of remorse or hatred, love or jealousy; neither do they contain any such psychological analysis of the emotions as has made the fame of subsequent writers. But there is an infinite variety of characters in action, and a perfect understanding of that form of the imagination which displays itself in whim-

sicalities corresponding to the "originals" or "humourists" of the Elizabethan comedy.

The numberless quotations from "old plays" at the head of Scott's chapters are not without significance. At times he approaches closer to Shakespeare than any other writer, whether of prose or verse. In one scene at least in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, where he describes the "singular and gloomy delight" of the three old cummers about the body of their contemporary, he lets us know that he has in mind the meeting of the witches in *Macbeth*, and I think on the whole he excels the dramatist in his own field. After all is said, the Shakespearian witch-scene is an arbitrary exercise of the fancy, which fails to carry with it a complete sense of reality: the illusion is not fully maintained. The dialogue in the novelist, on the contrary, is instinct with thrilling suggestiveness, for the very reason that it is based on the groundwork of national character. The superstitious awe is here simple realism, from the beginning of the scene down to the warning cry of the paralytic hag from the cottage:

"He 's a frank man, and a free-handed man, the Master," said Annie Winnie, "and a comely personage—broad in the shouthers, and narrow around the lunyies. He wad mak a bonny corpse; I wad like to hae the streiking and winding o' him."

"It is written on his brow, Annie Winnie," returned the octogenarian, her companion, "that hand of woman, or of man either, will never straught him; dead-deal will

never be laid on his back, make you your market of that, for I hae it frae a sure hand."

"Will it be his lot to die on the battle-ground then, Ailsie Gourlay? Will he die by the sword or the ball, as his forbears hae dune before him, mony ane o' them?"

"Ask nae mair questions about it—he 'll no be graced sae far," replied the sage.

"I ken ye are wiser than ither folk, Ailsie Gourlay. But wha tell'd ye this?"

"Fashna your thumb about that, Annie Winnie," answered the sibyl. "I hae it frae a hand sure eneugh."

"But ye said ye never saw the foul thief," reiterated her inquisitive companion.

"I hae it frae as sure a hand," said Ailsie, "and frae them that spaed his fortune before the sark gaed ower his head."

"Hark! I hear his horse's feet riding aff," said the other; "they dinna sound as if good luck was wi' them."

"Mak haste, sirs," cried the paralytic hag from the cottage, "and let us do what is needfu', and say what is fitting; for, if the dead corpse binna straughted, it will girn and thraw, and that will fear the best o' us."

But more often Scott approaches the lesser lights of the Elizabethan comedians, whose work is in general subject to the same laws as the novel, and who filled their plays with whimsical creatures—

> Bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more,
> Whose manners, now called humours, feed the stage.

You cannot read through the *dramatis personæ* of one of these plays (Witgood, Lucre, Hoard, Limber, Kix, Lamprey, Spichcock, Dampit, etc.)

without being reminded of the long list of originals that figure in the Scotch novels; and in one case at least, Baron Bradwardine of *Waverley*, Scott goes out of his way to compare him with a character of Ben Jonson's. And you cannot but feel that Scott has surpassed his models on their own ground, partly because his genius was greater and partly because the novel is a wider and freer field for such characters than the drama—at least when the drama is deprived of its stage setting. But Scott's greatest advantage is due to the fact that what in England was mainly an exaggeration of the more unsociable traits of character seems in Scotland to reach down to the very foundation of the popular life. His characters are not the creation of individual eccentricities only, but spring from an inexhaustible quaintness of the national temper. From every standpoint we are led back to consider the greatness of the author as depending on his happy genius in finding a voice for a rare and noteworthy phase of society.

Much of the Scotch temperament, its self-dependence, clan attachments, cunning, its gloomy exaltations relieved at times by a wide and serene prospect, may be traced, as Buckle has so admirably shown, to the physical conditions of the land; and in reading the history of Scotland, with its stories of the adventures of Wallace and Bruce and its battles of Bannockburn and Prestonpans, it seems quite fitting that the wild scenery of the country should be constantly

associated with the deeds of its heroes. There is something of charm in the very names of the landscape—in the haughs, corries, straths, friths, burns, and braes. The fascination of the Scotch lakes and valleys was one of the first to awaken the world to an admiration of savage nature, as we may read in Gray's letters; and Scott, from Waverley's excursion into the wild fastnesses of highland robbers and chiefs to the lonely sea-scenes of Zetland in *The Pirate*, has carried us through a succession of natural pictures such as no other novelist ever conceived. And he has maintained always that most difficult art of describing minutely enough to convey the illusion of a particular scene and broadly enough to evoke those general emotions which alone justify descriptive writing. Perhaps his most notable success is the visit of Guy Mannering to Ellangowan, where sea, sky, and land unite to form a picture of strangely luminous beauty. He not only succeeded in exciting a new romantic interest in Scotch scenery, but he has actually added to the market price of properties. It is said that his descriptions are mentioned in the title deeds of various estates as forming a part of their transmitted value.

But the scenery depicted by Scott is only the setting of a curious and paradoxical life, and it is the light thrown on this life that lends the chief interest to Mr. Lang's History. Owing in part to the peculiar position and formation of the land,

and in part to the strain of Celtic blood in the Highland tribes, there was bred in the Scotch people an unusual mingling of romance and realism, of imagination and worldly cunning, that sets them quite apart from other races; and this paradoxical mingling of opposite tendencies shows itself in the quality of their politics, their religion, and in all their social manners.

Not the least interesting of Mr. Lang's chapters is that in which he analyses the feudal chivalry of Scotland, and explains how it rested on a more imaginative basis than in other countries; how the power of the chief hung on unwritten rights instead of formal charters, and how the loyalty of the clansmen was exalted to the highest pitch of personal enthusiasm. But to complete the picture one should read Buckle's scathing arraignment of a loyalty which was ready to sell its king and was no purer than the faith that holds together a band of murderous brigands. So, too, in religion the Scotch were perhaps more given to superstition, and were more ready to sacrifice life and all else for their belief than any other people of Europe, except the Spaniards, while at the same time their bigotry never interfered with a vein of caution and shrewd worldliness. There is in *Waverley* an admirable example at once of this paradoxical nature, and of the true basis of Scott's strength. In the loyalism of Flora MacIvor he has attempted to embody an ideal of the imagination not based on this national mingling of

qualities—though, of course, isolated individuals of that heroic type may have existed in the land; and as a result he has produced a character that leaves the reader perfectly cold and unconvinced. But the moment Waverley comes from the Mac-Ivors and descends to the real life of Scotland, mark the change. We are immediately put on terra firma by the cautious reply of Waverley's guide when asked if it is Sunday: "Could na say just preceesely; Sunday seldom cam aboon the pass of Bally-Brough." Consider the mixture of bigotry and worldly greed in Mr. Ebenezer Cruikshanks, the innkeeper, who compounds for the sin of receiving a traveller on fastday by doubling the tariff. In any other land Mr. Ebenezer Cruikshank would have been a hypocrite and a scoundrel; in Scotland his religious fervour is quite as genuine as his cunning; and the very audacity of the combination carries with it the conviction of realism.

The same contrast of qualities will be found to mark the lesser traits of character. Consider the long list of servants and retainers with their stiff-necked devotion and their incorrigible self-seeking. In one of his notes Scott relates the story of a retainer who when ordered to leave his master's service replied: "In troth, and that will I not; if your honour disna ken when ye hae a gude servant, I ken when I hae a gude master, and go away I will not." At another time, when his master cried out in vexation: "John, you and I

shall never sleep under the same roof again!" the fellow calmly retorted, "Where the deil can your honour be ganging?" In like manner the mixture of devotion and self-seeking in that quaintest of followers, Richie Moniplies, is worth a thousand false idealisations. To read almost on the same page his immovable loyalty to Nigel and his brazen treachery in presenting his own petition first to the King, is to gain at once an entrance into a new region of psychology and to acquire a truer understanding of Scotch history. At another time, when catechised about the alleged spirit in Master Heriot's house, the good Moniplies gives an example of combined superstition, scepticism, and cunning, which must be read at length—and all the world has read it—to be appreciated. Perhaps the most useful illustration to be gained from this same Moniplies is the strange contrast of solemnity and humour, of reverence and familiarity, exhibited by him. I need not repeat the description of that "half-pedant, half-bully," nor quote the whole of his account of meeting with the King; let it be enough to call attention to the curious mingling of mirth and solemnity in the way he apostrophises the royal James: "My certie, lad, times are changed since ye came fleeing down the backstairs of auld Holyrood House, in grit fear, having your breeks in your hand without time to put them on, and Frank Stewart, the wild Earl of Bothwell, hard at your haunches." There is in the temper of

worthy Moniplies something wholly different from the boisterous humour of England and from the dry laughter of America; and this is due to the continually upcropping substratum of imagination and romance in his character. He would resemble the grotesque seriousness of Don Quixote, were it not for a strain of sourness and suspicion that are quite foreign to the generous Hidalgo.

So we might follow the paradox of Scotch character through its union of gloomy moroseness with homely affections, of unrestrained emotionalism with cold calculation, of awesome second-sight with the cheapest charlatanry. In the end, perhaps, all these contradictions would resolve themselves into the one peculiar anomaly of seeing the free romance of enthusiasm rising like a flower—a flower often enough of sinister aspect—out of the most prosaic grossness. Certainly it is the chief interest of Scotch history—by showing that these contradictions actually exist in the national temperament and by explaining so far as may be their origin—to confirm for us our belief in what may be called the realism of Scott's romance. This is that guiding thread which leads the weary voyager through the mists and chaotic confusions of Caledonian annals up to light. And in that region of light what wonderful cheer for the soul! Here, if anywhere in prose, the illusions of the imagination may take pleasant possession of our heart, for they come with the authority of a great na-

tional experience and walk hand in hand with the soberest realities. Even the wild enthusiasm of a Meg Merrilies barely awakens the voice of slumbering scepticism in the midst of our secure conviction. And sojourning for a while in that world of strange enchantment we seem to feel the limitations that vex our larger hopes and hem in our wills broken down at the command of a magic voice. It is as if that incompleteness of our nature, which the schoolmen called in their fantastic jargon the *principium individuationis* and ascribed to the bondage of these material bodies, were for a time forgotten, while we form a part of that free and complex existence so faithfully portrayed in the Scotch novels.

SWINBURNE

It is no more than fair to confess at the outset that my knowledge of Swinburne's work until recently was of the scantiest. The patent faults of his style were of a kind to warn me away, and it might be equally true that I was not sufficiently open to his peculiar excellences. Gladly, therefore, I accepted the occasion offered by the new edition of his Collected Poems[1] to enlarge my acquaintance with one of the much-bruited names of the age. Nor did it seem right to trust to a hasty impression. The six volumes of his poems, together with the plays and critical essays, have lain on my table for several months, the companions of many a long day of leisure and the relish thrown in between other readings of pleasure and necessity. Yet even now I must admit something alien to me in the man and his work; I am not sure that I always distinguish between what is spoken with the lips only and what springs from the poet's heart. Possibly the lack of biographical information is the partial cause of this uncertainty, for by a curious anomaly Swinburne, one of the most egotistical writers of the century,

[1] *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne.* In six volumes. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1904.

has shown a fine reticence in keeping the details of his life from the public. He was, we know, born in London, in 1837, of an ancient and noble family, his father, as befitted one whose son was to sing of the sea so lustily, being an admiral in the navy. His early years were passed either at his grandfather's estate in Northumbria or at the home of his parents in the Isle of Wight. From Eton he went, after an interval of two years, to Balliol College, Oxford, leaving in 1860 without a degree. The story runs that he knew more Greek than his examiners, but failed to show a proper knowledge of Scripture. If the tale is true, he made up well in after years for the deficiency, for few of our poets have been more steeped in the language of the Bible. In London he came under the influence of many of the currents moving below the surface; the spell of that master of souls, Rossetti, touched him, and the dominance of the ardent Mazzini. Since 1879 he has lived at "The Pines," on the edge of Wimbledon Common, with Mr. Watts-Dunton, in what appears to be an ideal atmosphere of sympathetic friendship. Mr. Douglas's recent indiscretion on *Theodore Watts-Dunton* tells nothing of the life in this scholarly retreat, but it does contain many photogravures of the works of art, the handicraft of Rossetti largely, which adorn the dwelling with beautiful memories.

Such is the meagre outline of Swinburne's life, nor do the few other events recorded or the

authentic anecdotes help us much to a more intimate knowledge of the man. Yet he has the ambiguous gift of awakening curiosity. Probably the first question most people ask on laying down his *Poems and Ballads* (that *péché de jeunesse*, as he afterwards called it) is to know how much of the book is "true." Mr. Swinburne has expressed a becoming contempt for "the scornful or mournful censors who insisted on regarding all the studies of passion or sensation attempted or achieved in it as either confessions of positive fact or excursions of absolute fancy." One does not like to be classed among the *scornful or mournful*, and yet I should feel much easier in my appreciation of the *Poems and Ballads* if I knew how far they were based on the actual experience of the author. The reader of Swinburne feels constantly as if his feet were swept from the earth and he were carried into a misty mid-region where blind currents of air beat hither and thither; he longs for some anchor to reality. In the later books this sensation becomes almost painful, and it is because the earlier publications, the *Atalanta* and the first *Poems and Ballads*, contain more of definable human emotion, whatever their relation to fact may be, that they are likely to remain the most popular and significant of Swinburne's works.

The publication of *Atalanta* at the age of twenty-eight made him famous, *Poems and Ballads* the next year made him almost infamous. The alarm aroused in England by *Dolores* and *Faustine*

still vibrates in our ears as we repeat the wonderful rhythms. The impression is deepened by the remarkable unity of feeling that runs through these voluble songs—the feeling of infinite satiety. The satiety of the flesh hangs like a fatal web about the *Laus Veneris;* the satiety of disappointment clings "with sullen savour of poisonous pain" to *The Triumph of Time;* satiety speaks in the *Hymn to Proserpine*, with its regret for the passing of the old heathen gods; it seeks relief in the unnatural passion of *Anactoria*—

> Clothed with deep eyelids under and above—
> Yea, all thy beauty sickens me with love;

turns to the abominations of cruelty in *Faustine;* sings enchantingly of rest in *The Garden of Proserpine*—

> Here, where the world is quiet,
> Here, where all trouble seems
> Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
> In doubtful dreams of dreams;
> I watch the green field growing
> For reaping folk and sowing,
> For harvest-time and mowing,
> A sleepy world of streams.
>
> I am tired of tears and laughter,
> And men that laugh and weep,
> Of what may come hereafter
> For men that sow to reap:
> I am weary of days and hours,
> Blown buds of barren flowers,
> Desires and dreams and powers
> And everything but sleep.

Now the acquiescence of weariness may have its inner compensations, even its sacred joys; but satiety, with its torturing impotence and its hungering for forbidden fruit, is perhaps the most immoral word in the language; its unashamed display causes a kind of physical revulsion in any wholesome mind. My own feeling is that Swinburne, when he wrote these poems, had little knowledge or experience of the world, but, as sometimes happens with unbalanced natures, had sucked poison from his classical reading until his brain was in a kind of ferment. While in this state he fell under the spell of Baudelaire's deliberate perversion of the passions, with results which threw the innocent Philistines of England into a fine bewilderment of horror. That the poet's own heart was sound at core, and that his satiety was of the imagination and not of the body, would seem evident from the abruptness with which he passed, under a more wholesome stimulus, to a very different mood. Unfortunately, his maturer productions are lacking in the quality of human emotion which, however derived, pulsates in every line of the *Poems and Ballads*. There is a certain contagion in such a song as *Dolores*. Taking all things into consideration, and with all one's repulsion for its substance, that poem is still the most effective of Swinburne's works, a magnificent lyric of blended emotion and music. It is a personification of the mood which produced the whole book, a cry of

the tormented heart to our Lady of Satiety. It is filled with regret for a past of riotous pleasure; it pants with the lust of blood; it is gorgeous and heavily scented, and the rhythm of it is the swaying of bodies drunken with voluptuousness:

Fruits fail and love dies and time ranges;
Thou art fed with perpetual breath,
And alive after infinite changes,
And fresh from the kisses of death;
Of languors rekindled and rallied,
Of barren delights and unclean,
Things monstrous and fruitless, a pallid
And poisonous queen.

Could you hurt me, sweet lips, though I hurt you?
Men touch them, and change in a trice
The lilies and languors of virtue
For the raptures and roses of vice;
Those lie where thy foot on the floor is,
These crown and caress thee and chain,
O splendid and sterile Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain.

No doubt you will find here in germ all that was to mar the poet's later work. The rhythm lacks resistance; there is no definite vision evoked out of the rapid flux of images; the thought has no sure control over the words. Dolores is almost in the same breath the queen of languors and raptures; she is pallid and rosy, and a hostile criticism might find in the stanzas a succession of contradictions. Compare the poem with the few

lines in *Jenny* where Rossetti has expressed the same idea of man's inveterate lust:

> Like a toad within a stone
> Seated while Time crumbles on ;
> Which sits there since the earth was cursed
> For Man's transgression at the first—

and the difference is immediately apparent between that concentration of mind which sums up a thought in a single definite image and the fluctuating, impalpable vision of a poet carried away by the intoxication of words. All that is true, and yet, somehow, out of this poem of *Dolores* there does arise in the end a very real and memorable mood — real after the fashion of a mood excited by music rather than by painting or sculpture.

The *Poems and Ballads* are splendid but *malsain;* they are impressive and they have the strength, ambiguous it may be, of springing, directly or indirectly, from a genuine emotion of the body. The change on passing to the *Songs Before Sunrise* (published in 1871) is extraordinary. During the five years that elapsed between these volumes the two master passions of Swinburne's life laid hold on him with devastating effect—the passion of Liberty and the passion of the Sea. Henceforth the influence of Mazzini and Victor Hugo was to dominate him like an obsession. Now, heaven forbid that one should say or think anything in despite of Liberty! The mere name con-

jures up recollections of glory and pride, and in it the hopes of the future are involved. And yet the very magnitude of its content renders it peculiarly liable to misuse. To this man it means one thing, and to another another, and many might cry out in the end, as Brutus did over virtue: "Thou art a naked word, and I followed thee as though thou hadst been a substance!" Certainly nothing is more dangerous for a poet than to fall into the habit of mouthing those great words of liberty, virtue, patriotism, and the like, abstracted of very definite events and very precise imagery. To Swinburne the sound of liberty was a charm to cast him into a kind of frothing mania. It is true that one or two of the poems on this theme are lifted up with a superb and genuine lyric enthusiasm. *The Eve of Revolution*, for instance, with which the *Songs Before Sunrise* open, rings with the stirring noise of trumpets:

I hear the midnight on the mountains cry
With many tongues of thunders, and I hear
Sound and resound the hollow shield of sky
With trumpet-throated winds that charge and cheer,
And through the roar of the hours that fighting fly,
Through flight and fight and all the fluctuant fear. . . .

But even here the reverberation of the words begins to conceal their meaning, and such abstractions as "the roar of the hours" lead into the worst of Swinburne's faults. Many of the longer

hymns to liberty are nearly unreadable — at least if any one can endure to the end of *A Song of Italy*, it is not I. And as one goes through these rhapsodies that came out year after year, one begins to feel that Swinburne's notion of liberty, when it is not empty of meaning, is something even worse. Too often it is Kipling's gross idolatry of England uttered in a kind of hysterical falsetto. It was not pretty at a time of estrangement between England and France to speak of "French hounds whose necks are aching Still from the chain they crave"; and one needed not to sympathise with the Boers in the South African war to feel something like disgust at Swinburne's abuse:

> . . . the truth whose witness now draws near
> To scourge these dogs, agape with jaws afoam,
> Down out of life.

Probably the poet thought he was giving voice to a righteous and Miltonic indignation. The best criticism of such a sonnet is to turn to Milton's "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints."

I have read somewhere a story of Swinburne's driving up late to a dinner and entering into a violent altercation with the cabman, to the vast amusement of the waiting guests within the house. That incorrigible wag and hanger-on of genius, Charles Augustus Howell, was of the party and acted as chorus to the dialogue outside.

"The poet's got the best of it, as usual," drawls the chorus. "He lives at the British Hotel in Cockspur Street, and never goes anywhere except in hansoms, which, whatever the distance, he invariably remunerates with one shilling. Consequently, when, as to-day, it 's a case of two miles beyond the radius, there 's the devil's own row; but in the matter of imprecation the poet is more than a match for cabby, who, after five minutes of it, gallops off as though he had been rated by Beelzebub himself." Really, 't is a bit of gossip which may be taken as a comment on not a few of Swinburne's dithyrambs of liberty.

Not less noble in significance is that other word, the sea, which Swinburne now uses with endless reiteration. In his reverence for the weltering ocean ways, the bulwark of England's freedom, he does of course only follow the best traditions of English poetry from *Beowulf* to *The Seven Seas* of Kipling, who is again in this his imitator. Nor is it the world of water alone that dominates his imagination, but with it the winds and the panorama of the sky ever rolling above. Already in the *Poems and Ballads* there is a hint of the sympathy between the poet and this realm of water and air. One of the finest passages in *The Triumph of Time* is that which begins:

> I will go back to the great sweet mother,
> Mother and lover of men, the sea.
> I will go down to her, I and none other,
> Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me.

But for the most part the atmosphere of those poems was too sultry for the salt spray of ocean, and it is only with the *Songs Before Sunrise*, with the obsession of the idea of liberty, that we are carried to the wide sea "that makes immortal motion to and fro," and to the "shrill, fierce climes of inconsolable air." Thenceforth the reader is like some wave-tossed mariner who should take refuge in the cave of Æolus; at least he is forced to admire the genius that presides over the gusty concourse:

> Hic vasto rex Æolus antro
> Luctantis ventos tempestatesque sonoras
> Imperio premit ac vinclis et carcere frenat.
> Illi indignantes magno cum murmure montis
> Circum claustra fremunt.

The comparison is not so far-fetched as it might seem. There is a picture of Swinburne in the *Recollections* of the late Henry Treffry Dunn which almost personifies him as the storm-king:

> It had been a very sultry day, and with the advancing twilight, heavy thunder-clouds were rolling up. The door opened and Swinburne entered. He appeared in an abstracted state, and for a few minutes sat silent. Soon, something I had said anent his last poem set his thoughts loose. Like the storm that had just broken, so he began in low tones to utter lines of poetry. As the storm increased, he got more and more excited and carried away by the impulse of his thoughts, bursting into a torrent of splendid verse that seemed like some grand air

with the distant peals of thunder as an intermittent accompaniment. And still the storm waxed more violent, and the vivid flashes of lightning became more frequent. But Swinburne seemed unconscious of it all, and whilst he paced up and down the room, pouring out bursts of passionate declamation, faint electric sparks played round the wavy masses of his luxuriant hair. . . . Amidst the rattle of the thunder he still continued to pour out his thoughts, his voice now sinking low and sad, now waxing louder as the storm listed.

The scattered poems in his later books that rise above the *Poems and Ballads* with a kind of grandiose suggestiveness are for the most part filled with echoes of wind and water. That haunting picture of crumbling desolation, *A Forsaken Garden*, lies "at the sea-down's edge between windward and lee." One of the few poems that seem to contain the cry of a real experience, *At a Month's End*, combines this aspect of nature admirably with human emotion:

> Silent we went an hour together,
> Under grey skies by waters white.
> *Our hearts were full of windy weather,*
> *Clouds and blown stars and broken light.*

And the sensation left from a reading of *Tristram of Lyonesse* is of a vast phantasmagoria, in which the beating of waves and the noise of winds, the light of dawns breaking on the water, and the floating web of stars, are jumbled together in splendid but inextricable confusion. So the coming of love upon Iseult, as she sails over

the sea with Tristram, takes this magnificent comparison:

> And as the august great blossom of the dawn
> Burst, and the full sun scarce from sea withdrawn
> Seemed on the fiery water a flower afloat,
> So as a fire the mighty morning smote
> Throughout her, and incensed with the influent hour
> Her whole soul's one great mystical red flower
> Burst. . . .

Further on the long confession of her passion at Tintagel, while Tristram has gone over-sea to that other Iseult, will be broken by those thundering couplets:

> And swordlike was the sound of the iron wind,
> And as a breaking battle was the sea.

But even to allude to all the passages of this kind in the poem—the swimming of Tristram, his rowing, and the other scenes—would fill an essay. In the end it must be confessed that this monotony of tone grows fatiguing. The rhythmic grace of the metre is like a bubble blown into the air, floating before our eyes with gorgeous iridescence —but when it touches earth, it bursts. There lies the fatal weakness of all this frenzy over liberty and this hymeneal chanting of sky and ocean; it has no basis in the homely facts of the heart. Read the account of Tristram and Iseult in the wilderness bower; it is all very beautiful, but you wonder why it leaves you so cold. There is not a single detail to fix an image of the place in the

mind, not a word to denote that we are dealing with the passion of individual human beings. Then turn to the same episode in the old poem of Gottfried von Strassburg; read the scene where the forsaken King Mark, through a window of their forest grotto, beholds the lovers lying asleep with the sword of Tristram stretched between them:

> He gazed on his heart's delight, Iseult, and deemed that never before had he seen her so fair. She lay sleeping, with a flush as of mingled roses on her cheek, and her red and glowing lips apart; a little heated by her morning wandering in the dewy meadow and by the spring. On her head was a chaplet woven of clover. A ray of sunlight from the little window fell upon her face, and as Mark looked upon her he longed to kiss her, for never had she seemed so fair and so lovable as now. And when he saw how the sunlight fell upon her he feared lest it harm her, or awaken her, so he took grass and leaves and flowers, and covered the window therewith, and spake a blessing on his love and commended her to God, and went his way, weeping.

It is good to walk with head lifted to the stars, but it is good also to have the feet well planted on earth. If another example of Swinburne's abstraction from human interest were desired, one might take that rhapsody of the wind-beaten waters and "land that is lonelier than ruin," called *By the North Sea*. The picture of desolate and barren waste is one of the most powerful creations in his later works (it was published in

1880), yet there is still something wanting to stamp the impression into the mind. You turn from it, perhaps, to Browning's similar description in *Childe Roland* and the reason is at once clear. You come upon the line: "One stiff, blind horse, his every bone a-stare," and pause. There is in Swinburne's poem no single touch which arrests the attention in this way, concentrating the effect, as it were, to a burning point, and bringing out the symbolic relation to human life. Yet I cannot pass from this subject without noticing what may appear a paradoxical phase of Swinburne's character. Only when he lowers his gaze from the furies and ecstasies of man's ambition to the instinctive ways of little children does his art become purely human. It would be easy to select a full dozen of the poems dealing with child-life and the tender love inspired by a child that touch the heart with their pure and chastened beauty. I should feel that an essential element of his art were left unremarked if I failed to quote some such examples as these two roundels on *First Footsteps* and a *A Baby's Death :*

A little way, more soft and sweet
  Than fields aflower with May,
A babe's feet, venturing, scarce complete
  A little way.

Eyes full of dawning day
  Look up for mother's eyes to meet,
Too blithe for song to say.

Glad as the golden spring to greet
Its first live leaflet's play,
Love, laughing, leads the little feet
A little way.

The little feet that never trod
Earth, never strayed in field or street,
What hand leads upward back to God
The little feet?

A rose in June's most honied heat,
When life makes keen the kindling sod,
Was not more soft and warm and sweet.

Their pilgrimage's period
A few swift moons have seen complete
Since mother's hands first clasped and shod
The little feet.

Despite the artificiality of the French form and a kind of revolving dizziness of movement, one catches in these child-lyrics a simplicity of feeling not unlike Longfellow's cry, "O little feet! that such long years." Swinburne himself might not relish the comparison, which is none the less just.

It is not often safe to attempt to sum up a large body of work in a phrase, yet with Swinburne we shall scarcely go astray if we seek such a characterisation in the one word *motion*. Both the beauty and the fault of his extraordinary rhythms are exposed in that term, and certainly his first claim to originality lies in his rhythmical innovations. There had been nothing in English comparable to the steady swell, like the waves of a

subsiding sea, in the lines of *Atalanta* and the *Poems and Ballads*. They brought a new sensuous pleasure into our poetry. But with time this cadenced movement developed into a kind of giddy race which too often left the reader belated and breathless. Little tricks of composition, such as a repeated cæsura after the seventh syllable of the pentameter, were employed to heighten the speed. Moreover, the longer lines in many of the poems are not organic, but consist of two or more short lines huddled together, the effect being to eliminate the natural resting-places afforded by the sense. And occasionally his metre is merely wanton. He uses one verse, for example, which with its combination of gliding motion and internal jingles is uncommonly irritating:

> Hills and *valleys* where April *rallies* his radiant squadron of flowers and *birds*,
> Steep strange *beaches* and lustrous *reaches* of fluctuant sea that the land *engirds*,
> Fields and *downs* that the sunrise *crowns* with life diviner than lives in *words*,—

a page of this sets the nerves all a-jangle.

And if Swinburne is one of the obscurest of English poets, it is due in large part to this same element of motion. A poem may move swiftly and still be perfectly easy to follow, so long as the thought is simple and concrete; witness the works of Longfellow. Or, on the other hand, the thought may be tortuous and still invite reflection.

so long as the metre forces a continual pause in the reading; witness Browning. Now, no one will accuse Swinburne of overloading his pages with thought; it is not there the obscurity lies. The difficulty is with the number and the peculiarly vague quality of his metaphors. Let me illustrate what I mean by this vagueness. I open one of the volumes at random and my eye rests on this line in *A Channel Passage:*

> As a tune that is played by the fingers of death on the keys of life or of sleep.

If one were reading the poem and tried to evoke this image before his mind, he would certainly need to pause for a moment. Or I open to *Walter Savage Landor* and find this passage marked:

> High from his throne in heaven Simonides,
> Crowned with mild aureole of memorial tears
> That the everlasting sun of all time sees
> All golden, molten from the forge of years.

The sentiment is simple enough, and it might be sufficient to feel the force of this in a general way, were it not that the metaphorical expression almost compels one to pause and form an image of the whole before proceeding. Such an image is, no doubt, possible; but the mingling of abstract and concrete terms makes the act of visualisation slow and painful. At the same time the rhythm is swift and continuous, so that any pause in the reading demands a deliberate effort of the will.

The result is a form of obscurity which in many of the poems is almost prohibitive for an indolent man—and are not the best readers always a little indolent? And there is another habit—trick, one might say—which increases this vagueness of metaphor in a curious manner. Constantly he uses a word in its ordinary, direct sense and then repeats it as an abstract personification. I find an example to hand in the stanzas written *At a Dog's Grave:*

> The shadow shed round those we *love* shines bright
> As *love's* own face.

It is only a mannerism such as another, but it recurs with sufficient frequency to have an appreciable effect on the mind.

Indeed, if this vagueness of imagery were only an occasional appearance, the difficulty would be slight. As a matter of fact, no inconsiderable portion of Swinburne's work is made up of a stream of half-visualised abstractions that crowd upon one another with the motion of clouds driven below the moon. He is more like Walt Whitman in this respect than any other poet in the language. Whitman is concrete and human and very earthly, but, with this difference, there is in both writers the same thronging procession of images which flit by without allowing the reader to concentrate his attention upon a single impression; they are both poets of vast and confused motion. Swinburne is notable for his want

of humour, yet he is keen enough to see how close this flux of high-sounding words lies to the absurd. In the present collected edition of his poems he has included *The Heptalogia, or Seven against Sense*, a series of parodies which does not spare his own mannerisms. Some scandalised Philistines, I doubt, might even need to be told that *Nephelidia* was a parody:

> Nay, for the nick of the tick of the time is a tremulous touch on the temples of terror,
> Strained as the sinews yet strenuous with strife of the dead who is dumb as the dust-heaps of death:
> Surely no soul is it, sweet as the spasm of erotic emotional exquisite error,
> Bathed in the balms of beatified bliss, beatific itself by beatitude's breath.

Pretty much all the traits of Swinburne's style are there—the long breathless lines with their flowing dactyls or anapæsts, the unabashed alliteration, the stream of half-visualised images, the trick of following an epithet with its own abstract substantive, the sense of motion, and above all the accumulation of words. Of this last trait of verbosity I have said nothing, for the reason that it is too notorious to need mentioning. It may not, however, be superfluous to point out a little more precisely the special form his tautology assumes. He is never more graphic and nearer to nature than when he describes the ecstasy of swimming at sea. He is himself passionately fond of the exercise, and once at least was almost drowned in

the Channel. Let us take, then, a stanza from *A Swimmer's Dream:*

> All the strength of the waves that perish
> Swells beneath me and laughs and sighs,
> Sighs for love of the life they cherish,
> Laughs to know that it lives and dies,
> Dies for joy of its life, and lives
> Thrilled with joy that its brief death gives—
> Death whose laugh or whose breath forgives
> Change that bids it subside and rise.

Pass the fault of beginning with the abstraction "strength"—the first two lines are graphic and reproduce a real sensation; the second two lines are an explanatory repetition; the last four dissolve both image and emotion into a flood of words. It is the common procedure in the later poems; it renders the regular dramas (with the exception of the earlier *Chastelard*) almost intolerably tedious.

And what is the impression of the man himself that remains after living with his works for several months? The frankness with which he parodies his own eccentricities might seem to indicate a becoming modesty, and yet that is scarcely the word that rises first to the lips. Indeed, when I read in the very opening of the Dedicatory Epistle that precedes the present edition of his poems such a statement as that "he finds nothing that he could wish to cancel, to alter, or to unsay, in any page he has ever laid before his reader," I was prepared for a character quite the contrary of modest, and as I turned page

after page, there became fixed in my mind a feeling that I should hesitate to call personal repulsion—a feeling of annoyance at least, for which no explanation was present. Only when I reached *Atalanta in Calydon*, in the fourth volume, did the reason of this become evident. That poem, exquisite in many ways, is filled with talk of time and gods, of love and hate, of life and death, of all high-sounding words that lend gravity to poetry, and yet in the end it is itself light and not grave. The very needless reiteration of these words, their bandying from verse to verse, deprives them of impressiveness. No, a true poet who respects the sacredness of noble ideas, who cherishes some awe for the mysteries, does not buffet them about as a shuttlecock; he uses them sparingly and only when the thought rises of necessity to those heights. There is a lack of emotional breeding, almost an indecency, in Swinburne's easy familiarity with these great things of the spirit.

And this judgment is confirmed by turning to his prose. I trust it is not prejudice, but after a while the vociferous and endless praise of Victor Hugo in his essays had a curious effect upon me. I began to ask: Is the critic really thinking of Hugo alone, or is half of this frenzied adulation meant for his own artistic methods? "Malignity and meanness, platitude and perversity, decrepitude of cankered intelligence and desperation of universal rancor," he exclaims against Sainte-

Beuve; and over the other critics of his idol he cries out, "The lazy malignity of envious dullness is as false and fatuous as it is common and easy." Can one avoid the surmise that he has more than Hugo to avenge in such tirades? It is the same with every one who is opposed to his own notions of art. Of Walt Whitman it is: "The dirty, clumsy paws of a harper whose plectrum is a muckrake." Of a French classicist: "It is the business of a Nisard to pass judgment and to bray." And of those who intimate (he is ostensibly defending Rossetti) that beauty and power of expression can accord with emptiness or sterility of matter: "This flattering unction the very foolishest of malignants will hardly in this case be able to lay upon the corrosive sore which he calls his soul." Sometimes, I admit, this manner of invective rises to a sublimity of fury that sounds like nothing so much as a combination of Carlyle and Shelley. For example: "The affection was never so serious as to make it possible for the most malignant imbecile to compare or to confound him [Jowett] with such morally and spiritually typical and unmistakable apes of the Dead Sea as Mark Pattison, or such renascent blossoms of the Italian renascence as the Platonic amorist of blue-breeched gondoliers who is now in Aretino's bosom." It 's not criticism; it 's not fair to Mark Pattison or to John Addington Symonds, but it is sublime. It is a storm of wind only, but it leaves a devastated track.

Enough has been said to indicate the trait of character that prevails through these pages of eulogy and vituperation. It is not nice to apply so crass a word as *conceit* to one who undoubtedly belongs to the immortals of our pantheon, yet the expression forces itself upon me. Listen to another of his outbursts, this time against Matthew Arnold: "His inveterate and invincible Philistinism, his full community of spirit and faith, in certain things of import, with the vulgarest English mind!" Does not the quality begin to define itself more exactly? There is a phrase they use in France, *épater le bourgeois*, of those artistic souls who contrast themselves by a kind of ineffable contempt with commonplace humanity, and who take pleasure in tweaking the nose, so to speak, of the amiable plebeian. Have a care, gentlemen! The Philistine has a curious trick of revenging himself in the long run. For my own part, when it comes to a breach between the poetical and the prosaic, I take my place submissively with the latter. There is at least a humble safety in retaining one's pleasure in certain things of import with the vulgarest English mind, and if it were obligatory to choose between them (as, happily, it is not) I would surrender the wind-swept rhapsodies of Swinburne for the homely conversation of Whittier.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

PROBABLY the first impression one gets from reading the *Complete Poetical Works* of Christina Rossetti, now collected and edited by her brother, Mr. W. M. Rossetti,[1] is that she wrote altogether too much, and that it was a doubtful service to her memory to preserve so many poems purely private in their nature. The editor, one thinks, might well have shown himself more "reverent of her strange simplicity." For page after page we are in the society of a spirit always refined and exquisite in sentiment, but without any guiding and restraining artistic impulse; she never drew to the shutters of her soul, but lay open to every wandering breath of heaven. In comparison with the works of the more creative poets her song is like the continuous lisping of an æolian harp beside the music elicited by cunning fingers. And then, suddenly, out of this sweet monotony, moved by some stronger, clearer breeze of inspiration, there sounds a strain of wonderful beauty and flawless perfection, unmatched in its own kind in English letters. An anonymous

[1] *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti.* With Memoir and Notes, etc. By William Michael Rossetti. New York; The Macmillan Co., 1904.

purveyor of anecdotes has recently told how one of these more exquisite songs called forth the enthusiasm of Swinburne. It was just after the publication of *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, and in a little company of friends that erratic poet and critic started to read aloud from the volume. Turning first to the devotional paraphrase which begins with "Passing away, saith the World, passing away," he chanted the lines in his own emphatic manner, then laid the book down with a vehement gesture. Presently he took it up again, and a second time read the poem through, even more impressively. "By God!" he exclaimed at the end, "that 's one of the finest things ever written!"

Passing away, saith the World, passing away:
Chances, beauty, and youth, sapped day by day,
Thy life never continueth in one stay.
Is the eye waxen dim, is the dark hair changing to grey,
That hath won neither laurel nor bay?
I shall clothe myself in Spring and bud in May:
Thou, root-stricken, shalt not rebuild thy decay
On my bosom for aye.
Then I answered: Yea.

Passing away, saith my Soul, passing away:
With its burden of fear and hope, of labour and play,
Hearken what the past doth witness and say:
Rust in thy gold, a moth is in thine array,
A canker is in thy bud, thy leaf must decay.
At midnight, at cockcrow, at morning, one certain day
Lo the Bridegroom shall come and shall not delay;
Watch thou and pray.
Then I answered: Yea.

Passing away, saith my God, passing away:
Winter passeth after the long delay:
New grapes on the vine, new figs on the tender spray,
Turtle calleth turtle in Heaven's May.
Though I tarry, wait for Me, trust Me, watch and pray:
Arise, come away, night is past and lo it is day:
My love, My sister, My spouse, thou shalt hear Me say.
Then I answered: Yea.

And Swinburne, somewhat contrary to his wont, was right. Purer inspiration, less troubled by worldly motives, than these verses cannot be found. Nor would it be difficult to discover in their brief compass most of the qualities that lend distinction to Christina Rossetti's work. Even her monotone, which after long continuation becomes monotony, affects one here as a subtle device heightening the note of subdued fervour and religious resignation; the repetition of the rhyming vowel creates the feeling of a secret expectancy cherished through the weariness of a frustrate life. If there is any excuse for publishing the many poems that express the mere unlifted, unvaried prayer of her heart, it is because their monotony may prepare the mind for the strange artifice of this solemn chant. But such a preparation demands more patience than a poet may justly claim from the ordinary reader. Better would be a volume of selections from her works, including a number of poems of this character. It would stand, in its own way, supreme in English literature,—as pure and fine an ex-

pression of the feminine genius as the world has yet heard.

It is, indeed, as the flower of strictly feminine genius that Christina Rossetti should be read and judged. She is one of a group of women who brought this new note into Victorian poetry,—Louisa Shore, Jean Ingelow, rarely Mrs. Browning, and, I may add, Mrs. Meynell. She is like them, but of a higher, finer strain than they (*καλαὶ δέ τε πᾶσαι*), and I always think of her as of her brother's Blessed Damozel, circled with a company of singers, yet holding herself aloof in chosen loneliness of passion. She, too, has not quite ceased to yearn toward earth:

> And still she bowed herself and stooped
> Out of the circling charm;
> Until her bosom must have made
> The bar she leaned on warm,
> And the lilies lay as if asleep
> Along her bended arm.

I have likened the artlessness of much of her writing to the sweet monotony of an æolian harp; the comparison returns as expressing also the purely feminine spirit of her inspiration. There is in her a passive surrender to the powers of life, a religious acquiescence, which wavers between a plaintive pathos and a sublime exultation of faith. The great world, with its harsh indifference for the weak, passes over her as a ruinous gale rushes over a sequestered wood-flower; she bows her

head, humbled but not broken, nor ever forgetful of her gentle mission,—

> And strong in patient weakness till the end.

She bends to the storm, yet no one, not the great mystics nor the greater poets who cry out upon the sound and fury of life, is more constantly impressed by the vanity and fleeting insignificance of the blustering power, or more persistently looks for consolation and joy from another source. But there is a difference. Read the masculine poets who have heard this mystic call of the spirit, and you feel yourself in the presence of a strong will that has grasped the world, and, finding it insufficient, deliberately casts it away; and there is no room for pathetic regret in their ruthless determination to renounce. But this womanly poet does not properly renounce at all, she passively allows the world to glide away from her. The strength of her genius is endurance:

> She stands there like a beacon through the night,
> A pale clear beacon where the storm-drift is—
> She stands alone, a wonder deathly-white:
> She stands there patient, nerved with inner might,
> Indomitable in her feebleness,
> Her face and will athirst against the light.

It is characteristic of her feminine disposition that the loss of the world should have come to her first of all in the personal relation of love. And here we must signalise the chief service of the

editor toward his sister. It was generally known in a vague way, indeed it was easy to surmise as much from her published work, that Christina Rossetti bore with her always the sadness of unfulfilled affection. In the introductory Memoir her brother has now given a sufficiently detailed account of this matter to remove all ambiguity. I am not one to wish that the reserves and secret emotions of an author should be displayed for the mere gratification of the curious; but in this case the revelation would seem to be justified as a needed explanation of poems which she herself was willing to publish. Twice, it appears, she gave her love, and both times drew back in a kind of tremulous awe from the last step. The first affair began in 1848, before she was eighteen, and ran its course in about two years. The man was one James Collinson, an artist of mediocre talent who had connected himself with the Pre-raphaelite Brotherhood. He was originally a Protestant, but had become a Roman Catholic. Then, as Christina refused to ally herself to one of that faith, he compliantly abandoned Rome for the Church of England. His conscience, however, which seems from all accounts to have been of a flabby consistency, troubled him in the new faith, and he soon reverted to Catholicism. Christina then drew back from him finally. It is not so easy to understand why she refused the second suitor, with whom she became intimately acquainted about 1860, and whom she loved in

her own retiring fashion until the day of her death. This was Charles Bagot Cayley, a brother of the famous Cambridge mathematician, himself a scholar and in a small way a poet. Some idea of the man may be obtained from a notice of him written by Mr. W. M. Rossetti for the *Athenæum* after his death. "A more complete specimen than Mr. Charles Cayley," says Mr. Rossetti, "of the abstracted scholar in appearance and manner—the scholar who constantly lives an inward and unmaterial life, faintly perceptive of external facts and appearances—could hardly be conceived. He united great sweetness to great simplicity of character, and was not less polite than unworldly." One might suppose that such a temperament was peculiarly fitted to join with that of the secluded poetess, and so, to judge from her many love poems, it actually was. Of her own heart or of his there seems to have been no doubt in her mind. Even in her most rapturous visions of heaven, like the yearning cry of the Blessed Damozel, the memory of that stilled passion often breaks out:

> How should I rest in Paradise,
> Or sit on steps of heaven alone?
> If Saints and Angels spoke of love,
> Should I not answer from my throne,
> Have pity upon me, ye my friends,
> For I have heard the sound thereof?

She seems even not to have been unfamiliar with the hope of joy, and I would persuade myself that

her best-known lyric of gladness, "My heart is like a singing-bird," was inspired by the early dawning of this passion. But the hope and the joy soon passed away and left her only the solemn refrain of acquiescence: "Then I answered: Yea." Her brother can give no sufficient explanation of this refusal on her part to accept the happiness almost within her hand, though he hints at lack of religious sympathy between the two. Some inner necessity of sorrow and resignation, one almost thinks, drew her back in both cases, some perception that the real treasure of her heart lay not in this world:

A voice said, "Follow, follow": and I rose
And followed far into the dreamy night,
Turning my back upon the pleasant light.
It led me where the bluest water flows,
And would not let me drink: where the corn grows
I dared not pause, but went uncheered by sight
Or touch: until at length in evil plight
It left me, wearied out with many woes.
Some time I sat as one bereft of sense:
But soon another voice from very far
Called, "Follow, follow": and I rose again.
Now on my night has dawned a blessed star:
Kind steady hands my sinking steps sustain,
And will not leave me till I go from hence.

It might seem that here was a spirit of renunciation akin to that of the more masculine mystics; indeed, a great many of her poems are, unconsciously I presume, almost a paraphrase of that recurring theme of the Imitation: "Nolle

consolari ab aliqua creatura," and again: "Amore igitur Creatoris, amorem hominis superavit; et pro humano solatio, divinum beneplacitum magis elegit." She, too, was unwilling to find consolation in any creature, and turned from the love of man to the love of the Creator; yet a little reading of her exquisite hymns will show that this renunciation has more the nature of surrender than of deliberate choice:

> He broke my will from day to day;
> He read my yearnings unexprest,
> And said them nay.

The world is withheld from her by a power above her will, and always this power stands before her in that peculiarly personal form which it is wont to assume in the feminine mind. Her faith is a mere transference to heaven of a love that terrifies her in its ruthless earthly manifestation; and the passion of her life is henceforth a yearning expectation of the hour when the Bridegroom shall come and she shall answer, Yea. Nor is the earthly source of this love forgotten; it abides with her as a dream which often is not easily distinguished from its celestial transmutation:

> O dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,
> Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,
> Where souls brimful of love abide and meet;
> Where thirsting longing eyes
> Watch the slow door
> That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live
My very life again though cold in death:
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
Speak low, lean low,
As long ago, my love, how long ago.

It is this perfectly passive attitude toward the powers that command her heart and her soul—a passivity which by its completeness assumes the misguiding semblance of a deliberate determination of life—that makes her to me the purest expression in English of the feminine genius. I know that many would think this pre-eminence belongs to Mrs. Browning. They would point out the narrowness of Christina Rossetti's range, and the larger aspects of woman's nature, neglected by her, which inspire some of her rival's best-known poems. To me, on the contrary, it is the very scope attempted by Mrs. Browning that prevents her from holding the place I would give to Christina Rossetti. So much of Mrs. Browning—her political ideas, her passion for reform, her scholarship—simply carries her into the sphere of the masculine poets, where she suffers by an unfair comparison. She would be a better and less irritating writer without these excursions into a field for which she was not entirely fitted. The uncouthness that so often mars her language is partly due to an unreconciled feud between her intellect and her heart. She had neither a woman's wise passivity nor a

man's controlling will. Even within the range of strictly feminine powers her genius is not simple and typical. And here I must take refuge in a paradox which is like enough to carry but little conviction. Nevertheless, it is the truth. I mean to say that probably most women will regard Mrs. Browning as the better type of their sex, whereas to men the honour will seem to belong to Miss Rossetti; and that the judgment of a man in this matter is more conclusive than a woman's. This is a paradox, I admit, yet its solution is simple. Women will judge a poetess by her inclusion of the larger human nature, and will resent the limiting of her range to the qualities that we look upon as peculiarly feminine. The passion of Mrs. Browning, her attempt to control her inspiration to the demands of a shaping intellect, her questioning and answering, her larger aims, in a word her effort to create,—all these will be set down to her credit by women who are as appreciative of such qualities as men, and who will not be annoyed by the false tone running through them. Men, on the contrary, are apt, in accepting a woman's work or in creating a female character, to be interested more in the traits and limitations which distinguish her from her masculine complement. They care more for the *idea* of woman, and less for woman as merely a human being. Thus, for example, I should not hesitate to say that in this ideal aspect Thackeray's heroines are more womanly than

George Eliot's,—though I am aware of the ridicule to which such an opinion lays me open; and for the same reason I hold that Christina Rossetti is a more complete exemplar of feminine genius, and, as being more perfect in her own sphere, a better poet than Mrs. Browning. That disconcerting sneer of Edward FitzGerald's, which so enraged Robert Browning, would never have occurred to him, I think, in the case of Miss Rossetti.

There is a curious comment on this contrast in the introduction to Christina Rossetti's *Monna Innominata*, a sonnet-sequence in which she tells her own story in the supposed person of an early Italian lady. "Had the great poetess of our own day and nation," she says, "only been unhappy instead of happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the *Portuguese Sonnets*, an inimitable 'donna innominata' drawn not from fancy, but from feeling, and worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura." Now this sonnet-sequence of Miss Rossetti's is far from her best work, and holds a lower rank in every way than that passionate self-revelation of Mrs. Browning's; yet to read these confessions of the two poets together is a good way to get at the division between their spirits. In Miss Rossetti's sonnets all those feminine traits I have dwelt on are present to a marked, almost an exaggerated, degree. They are harmonious within themselves, and filled with a quiet ease;

only the higher inspiration is lacking to them in comparison with her *Passing Away*, and other great lyrics. In Mrs. Browning, on the contrary, one cannot but feel a disturbing element. The very tortuousness of her language, the straining to render her emotion in terms of the intellect, introduces a quality which is out of harmony with the ground theme of feminine surrender. More than that, this submission to love, if looked at more closely, is itself in large part such as might proceed from a man as well as from a woman, so that there results an annoying confusion of masculine and feminine passion. Take, for instance, the twenty-second of the *Portuguese Sonnets*, one of the most perfect in the series:

> When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
> Face to face, drawing nigher and nigher,
> Until the lengthening wings break into fire
> At either curvèd point,—What bitter wrong
> Can earth do to us, that we should not long
> Be here contented? Think. In mounting higher,
> The angels would press on us, and aspire
> To drop some golden orb of perfect song
> Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
> Rather on earth, Beloved,—where the unfit
> Contrarious moods of men recoil away
> And isolate pure spirits, and permit
> A place to stand and love in for a day,
> With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.

That is noble verse, undoubtedly. The point is that it might just as well have been written by a

man to a woman as the contrary; it would, for example, fit perfectly well into Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *House of Life*. There is here no passivity of soul; the passion is not that of acquiescence, but of determination to press to the quick of love. Only, perhaps, a certain falsetto in the tone (if the meaning of that word may be so extended) shows that, after all, it was written by a woman, who in adopting the masculine pitch loses something of fineness and exquisiteness.

A single phrase of the sonnet, that "deep, dear silence," links it in my mind with one of Christina Rossetti's not found in the *Monna Innominata*, but expressing the same spirit of resignation. It is entitled simply *Rest:*

O Earth, lie heavily upon her eyes;
Seal her sweet eyes weary of watching, Earth;
Lie close around her; leave no room for mirth
With its harsh laughter, nor for sound of sighs.
She hath no questions, she hath no replies,
Hushed in and curtained with a blessed dearth
Of all that irked her from the hour of birth;
With stillness that is almost Paradise.
Darkness more clear than noonday holdeth her,
Silence more musical than any song;
Even her very heart has ceased to stir:
Until the morning of Eternity
Her rest shall not begin nor end, but be;
And when she wakes she will not think it long.

Am I misguided in thinking that in this stillness, this silence more musical than any song, the

feminine heart speaks with a simplicity and consummate purity such as I quite fail to hear in the *Portuguese Sonnets*, admired as those sonnets are? Nor could one, perhaps, find in all Christina Rossetti's poems a single line that better expresses the character of her genius than these magical words: "With stillness that is almost Paradise." That is the mood which, with the passing away of love, never leaves her; that is her religion; her acquiescent Yea, to the world and the soul and to God. Into that region of rapt stillness it seems almost a sacrilege to penetrate with inquisitive, critical mind; it is like tearing away the veil of modesty. I will not attempt to bring out the beauty of her mood by comparing it with that of the more masculine quietists, who reach out and take the kingdom of Heaven by storm, and whose prayer is, in the words of Tennyson:

> Our wills are ours, we know not how;
> Our wills are ours, to make them Thine.

It will be better to quote one other poem, perhaps her most perfect work artistically, and to pass on:

UP-HILL

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
Yea, beds for all who come.

The culmination of her pathetic weariness is always this cry for rest, a cry for supreme acquiescence in the will of Heaven, troubled by no personal volition, no desire, no emotion, save only love that waits for blessed absorption. Her latter years became what St. Teresa called a long "prayer of quiet"; and her brother's record of her secluded life in the refuge of his home, and later in her own house on Torrington Square, reads like the saintly story of a cloistered nun. It might be said of her, as of one of the fathers, that she needed not to pray, for her life was an unbroken communion with God. And yet that is not all. It is a sign of her utter womanliness that envy for the common affections of life was never quite crushed in her heart. Now and then through this monotony of resignation there wells up a sob of complaint, a note not easy, indeed, to distinguish from that *amari aliquid* of jealousy, which Thackeray, cynically, as some think, always left at the bottom of his gentlest feminine characters. The fullest expression of this feeling is in one of her longer poems, *The Lowest Room*, which

contrasts the life of two sisters, one of whom chooses the ordinary lot of woman with home and husband and children, while the other learns, year after tedious year, the consolation of lonely patience. The spirit of the poem is not entirely pleasant. The resurgence of personal envy is a little disconcerting; and the only comfort to be derived from it is the proof that under different circumstances Christina Rossetti might have given expression to the more ordinary lot of contented womanhood as perfectly as she sings the pathos and hope of the cloistered life. Had that first voice, which led her "where the bluest water flows," suffered her also to quench the thirst of her heart, had not that second voice summoned her to follow, this might have been. But literature, I think, would have lost in her gain. As it is, we must recognise that the vision of fulfilled affection and of quiet home joys still troubled her, in her darker hours, with a feeling of embittered regret. Two or three of the stanzas of *The Lowest Room* even evoke a reminiscence of that scene in Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night*, where the "shrill and lamentable cry" breaks through the silence of the shadowy congregation:

> In all eternity I had one chance,
> One few years' term of gracious human life,
> The splendours of the intellect's advance,
> The sweetness of the home with babes and wife.

But if occasionally this residue of bitterness in Christina Rossetti recalls the more acrid genius

of James Thomson, yet a comparison of the two poets (and such a comparison is not fantastic, however unexpected it may appear) would set the feminine character of our subject in a peculiarly vivid light. Both were profoundly moved by the evanescence of life, by the deceitfulness of pleasure, while both at times, Thomson almost continually, were troubled by the apparent content of those who rested in these joys of the world. Both looked forward longingly to the consummation of peace. In his call to *Our Lady of Oblivion* Thomson might seem to be speaking for both, only in a more deliberately metaphorical style:

> Take me, and lull me into perfect sleep;
> Down, down, far hidden in thy duskiest cave;
> While all the clamorous years above me sweep
> Unheard, or, like the voice of seas that rave
> On far-off coasts, but murmuring o'er my trance,
> A dim vast monotone, that shall enhance
> The restful rapture of the inviolate grave.

But the roads by which the two would reach this "silence more musical than any song" were utterly different. With an intellect at once mathematical and constructive, Thomson built out of his personal bitterness and despair a universe corresponding to his own mood, a philosophy of atheistic revolt. Like Lucretius, "he denied divinely the divine." In that tremendous conversation on the river-walk he represents one soul as protesting to another that not for all his misery would he carry the guilt of creating such a

world; whereto the second replies, and it is the poet himself who speaks:

> The world rolls round forever as a mill;
> It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
> It has no purpose, heart or mind or will. . . .
>
> Man might know one thing were his sight less dim;
> That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
> That it is quite indifferent to him.

There is the voluntary ecstasy of the saints, there is also this stern and self-willed rebellion, and, contrasted with them both, as woman is contrasted with man, there is the acquiescence of Christina Rossetti and of the little group of writers whom she leads in spirit:

> Passing away, saith the World, passing away. . . .
> Then I answered: Yea.

WHY IS BROWNING POPULAR?

It has come to be a matter of course that some new book on Browning shall appear with every season. Already the number of these manuals has grown so large that any one interested in critical literature finds he must devote a whole corner of his library to them—where, the cynical may add, they are better lodged than in his brain. To name only a few of the more recent publications: there was Stopford Brooke's volume, which partitioned the poet's philosophy into convenient compartments, labelled nature, human life, art, love, etc. Then came Mr. Chesterton, with his biting paradoxes and his bold justification of Browning's work, not as it ought to be, but as it is. Professor Dowden followed with what is, on the whole, the best *vade mecum* for those who wish to preserve their enthusiasm with a little salt of common sense; and, latest of all, we have now a critical study [1] by Prof. C. H. Herford, of the University of Manchester, which once more unrolls in all its gleaming aspects the poet's "joy in soul." Two things would seem to be clear from this succession of commentaries: Browning must

[1] *Robert Browning*. By C. H. Herford. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1905.

need a deal of exegesis, and he must be a subject of wide curiosity. Now obscurity and popularity do not commonly go together, and I fail to remember that any of the critics named has paused long enough in his own admiration to explain just why Browning has caught the breath of favour; in a word, to answer the question: Why is Browning popular?

There is, indeed, one response to such a question, so obvious and so simple that it might well be taken for granted. It would hardly seem worth while to say that despite his difficulty Browning is esteemed because he has written great poetry; and in the most primitive and unequivocal manner this is to a certain extent true. At intervals the staccato of his lines, like the drilling of a woodpecker, is interrupted by a burst of pure and liquid music, as if that vigorous and exploring bird were suddenly gifted with the melodious throat of the lark. It is not necessary to hunt curiously for examples of this power; they are fairly frequent and the best known are the most striking. Consider the first lines that sing themselves in the memory:

> O lyric Love, half-angel and half-bird,
> And all a wonder and a wild desire—

there needs no cunning exegete to point out the beauty of these. Their rhythm is of the singing, traditional kind that is familiar to us in all the true poets of the language; the harmony of the

vowel sounds and of the consonants, the very trick of alliteration, are obvious to the least critical; yet withal there is that miraculous suggestion in their charm which may be felt but cannot be converted into a prosaic equivalent. They stand out from the lines that precede and follow them in *The Ring and the Book*, as differing not so much in degree as in kind; they are lyrical, poetical, in the midst of a passage which is neither lyrical nor, precisely speaking, poetical. Elsewhere the surprise may be on the lower plane of mere description. So, throughout the peroration of *Paracelsus*, despite the glory and eloquence of the dying scholar's vision, one feels continually an alien element which just prevents a complete acquiescence in their magic, some residue of clogging analysis which has not quite been subdued to poetry—and then suddenly, as if some discordant instrument were silenced in an orchestra and unvexed music floated to the ear, the manner changes, thus:

> The herded pines commune and have deep thoughts,
> A secret they assemble to discuss
> When the sun drops behind their trunks which glare
> Like grates of hell.

And, take his works throughout, there is a good deal of this writing which has the ordinary, direct appeal to the emotions. Yet it is scattered, accidental so to speak; nor is it any pabulum of the soul as simple as this which converts the lover

of poetry into the Browningite. Even his common-sense admirers are probably held by something more recondite than this occasional charm.

> You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;
> Him you must watch—he 's sure to fall, yet stands!
> Our interest 's on the dangerous edge of things—

says Bishop Blougram, and the attraction of Browning to many is just in watching what may be called his acrobatic psychology. Consider this same *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, in some respects the most characteristic, as it is certainly not the least prodigious, of his poems. "Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour Sylvester Blougram"—talked and smiled to a silent listener concerning the strange mixture of doubt and faith which lie snugly side by side in the mind of an ecclesiastic who is at once a hypocrite and a sincere believer in the Church. The mental attitude of the speaker is subtile enough in itself to be fascinating, but the real suspense does not lie there. The very balancing of the priest's argument may at first work a kind of deception, but read more attentively and it begins to grow clear that no man in the wily bishop's predicament ever talked in this way over his wine or anywhere else. And here lies the real piquancy of the situation. His words are something more than a confession; they are this and at the same time the poet's, or if you will the bishop's own, comment to himself on that confession. He who talks is

never quite in the privacy of solitude, nor is he ever quite conscious of his listener, who as a matter of fact is not so much a person as some half-personified opinion of the world or abstract notion set against the character of the speaker. And this is Browning's regular procedure not only in those wonderful dramatic monologues, *Men and Women*, that form the heart of his work, but in *Paracelsus*, in *The Ring and the Book*, even in the songs and the formal dramas.

Perhaps the most remarkable and most obvious example of this suspended psychology is to be found in *The Ring and the Book*. Take the canto in which Giuseppe Caponsacchi relates to the judges his share in the tangled story. It is clear that the interest here is not primarily in the event itself, nor does it lie in that phase of the speaker's character which would be revealed by his confession before such a court as he is supposed to confront. The fact is, that Caponsacchi's language is not such as under the circumstances he could possibly be conceived to use. As the situation forms itself in my mind, he might be in his cell awaiting the summons to appear. In that solitude and uncertainty he goes over in memory the days in Arezzo, when the temptation first came to him, and once more takes the perilous ride with Pompilia to Rome. He lives again through the great crisis, dissecting all his motives, balancing the pros and cons of each step; yet all the time he has in mind the opinion of the world as

personified in the judges he is to face. The psychology is suspended dexterously between self-examination and open confession, and the reader who accepts the actual dramatic situation as suggested by Browning loses the finest and subtlest savour of the speech. In many places it would be simply preposterous to suppose we are listening to words really uttered by the priest.

We did go on all night; but at its close
She was troubled, restless, moaned low, talked at whiles
To herself, her brow on quiver with the dream:
Once, wide awake, she menaced, at arms' length
Waved away something—"Never again with you!
My soul is mine, my body is my soul's:
You and I are divided ever more
In soul and body: get you gone!" Then I—
"Why, in my whole life I have never prayed!
Oh, if the God, that only can, would help!
Am I his priest with power to cast out fiends?
Let God arise and all his enemies
Be scattered!" By morn, there was peace, no sigh
Out of the deep sleep—

no, those words were never spoken in the ears of a sceptical, worldly tribunal; they belong to the most sacred recesses of memory; yet at the same time that memory is coloured by a consciousness of the world's clumsy judgment.

It would be exaggeration to say that all Browning's greater poems proceed in this involved manner, yet the method is so constant as to be the

most significant feature of his work. And it bestows on him the honour of having created a new genre which follows neither the fashion of lyric on the one hand nor that of drama or narrative on the other, but is a curious and illusive hybrid of the two. The passions are not uttered directly as having validity and meaning in the heart of the speaker alone, nor are they revealed through action and reaction upon the emotions of another. His dramas, if read attentively, will be found really to fall into the same mixed genre as his monologues. And a comparison of his *Sordello* with such a poem as Goethe's *Tasso* (which is more the dialogue of a narrative poem than a true drama) will show how far he fails to make a character move visibly amid opposing circumstances. In both poems we have a contrast of the poetical temperament with the practical world. In Browning it is difficult to distinguish the poet's own thought from the words of the hero; the narrative is in reality a long confession of Sordello to himself who is conscious of a hostile power without. In Goethe this hostile power stands out as distinctly as Tasso himself, and they act side by side each to his own end.

There is even a certain significance in what is perhaps the most immediately personal poem Browning ever wrote, that *One Word More* which he appended to his *Men and Women*. Did he himself quite understand this lament for Raphael's

lost sonnets and Dante's interrupted angel, this desire to find his love a language,

> Fit and fair and simple and sufficient—
> Using nature that 's an art to others,
> Not, this one time, art that 's turned his nature?

It would seem rather the uneasiness of his own mind when brought face to face with strong feeling where no escape remains into his oblique mode of expression. And the man Browning of real life, with his training in a dissenting Camberwell home and later his somewhat dapper acceptance of the London social season, accords with such a view of the writer. It is, too, worthy of note that almost invariably he impressed those who first met him as being a successful merchant, a banker, a diplomat — anything but a poet. There was passion enough below the surface, as his outburst of rage against FitzGerald and other incidents of the kind declare; but the direct exhibition of it was painful if not grotesque.

Yet in this matter, as in everything that touches Browning's psychology, it is well to proceed cautiously. Because he approached the emotions thus obliquely, as it were in a style hybrid between the lyric and the drama, it does not follow that his work is void of emotion or that he questioned the validity of human passion. The very contrary is true. I remember, indeed, once hearing a lady, whose taste was as frank as it was modern, say that she liked Browning better than

Shakespeare because he was more emotional and less intellectual than the older dramatist. Her distinction was somewhat confused, but it leads to an important consideration; I do not know but it points to the very heart of the question of Browning's popularity. He is not in reality more emotional than Shakespeare, but his emotion is of a kind more readily felt by the reader of to-day; nor does he require less use of the intellect, but he does demand less of that peculiar translation of the intellect from the particular to the general point of view which is necessary to raise the reader into what may be called the poetical mood. In one sense Browning is nearly the most intellectual poet in the language. The action of his brain was so nimble, his seizure of every associated idea was so quick and subtile, his elliptical style is so supercilious of the reader's needs, that often to understand him is like following a long mathematical demonstration in which many of the intermediate equations are omitted. And then his very trick of approaching the emotions indirectly, his suspended psychology as I have called it, requires a peculiar flexibility of the reader's mind. But in a way these roughnesses of the shell possess an attraction for the educated public which has been sated with what lies too accessibly on the surface. They hold out the flattering promise of an initiation into mysteries not open to all the world. Our wits have become pretty well sharpened by the complexities

of modern life, and we are ready enough to prove our analytical powers on any riddle of poetry or economics. And once we have penetrated to the heart of these enigmas we are quite at our ease. His emotional content is of a sort that requires no further adjustment; it demands none of that poetical displacement of the person which is so uncomfortable to the keen but prosaic intelligence.

And here that tenth Muse, who has been added to the Pantheon for the guidance of the critical writer, trembles and starts back. She beholds to the right and the left a quaking bog of abstractions and metaphysical definitions, whereon if a critic so much as set his foot he is sucked down into the bottomless mire. She plucks me by the ear and bids me keep to the strait and beaten path, whispering the self-admonition of one who was the darling of her sisters:

> I *won't* philosophise, and *will* be read.

Indeed, the question that arises is no less than the ultimate distinction between poetry and prose, and "ultimates" may well have an ugly sound to one who is content if he can comprehend what is concrete and very near at hand. And, as for that, those who would care to hear the matter debated in terms of *Idee* and *Begriff*, *Objektivität* and *Subjektivität*, must already be familiar with those extraordinary chapters in Schopenhauer wherein philosophy and literature are married as they have seldom been elsewhere since the days of

Plato. And yet without any such formidable apparatus as that, it is not difficult to see that the peculiar procedure of Browning's mind offers to the reader a pleasure different more in kind than in degree from what is commonly associated with the word poetry. His very manner of approaching the passions obliquely, his habit of holding his portrayal of character in suspense between direct exposition and dramatic reaction, tends to keep the attention riveted on the individual speaker or problem, and prevents that escape into the larger and more general vision which marks just the transition from prose to poetry.

It is not always so. Into that cry "O lyric Love" there breaks the note which from the beginning has made lovers forget themselves in their song—the note that passes so easily from the lips of Persian Omar to the mouth of British Fitz-Gerald:

> Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire
> To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
> Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
> Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

Is it not clear how, in these direct and lyrical expressions, the passion of the individual is carried up into some region where it is blended with currents of emotion broader than any one man's loss or gain? and how, reading these words, we, too, feel that sudden enlargement of the heart which it is the special office of the poet to bestow? But it is equally true that Browning's treatment

of love, as in *James Lee's Wife* and *In a Balcony*, to name the poems nearest at hand, is for the most part so involved in his peculiar psychological method that we cannot for a moment forget ourselves in this freer emotion.

And in his attitude towards nature it is the same thing. I have not read Schopenhauer for many years, but I remember as if it were yesterday my sensation of joy as in the course of his argument I came upon these two lines quoted from Horace:

> Nox erat et cælo fulgebat luna sereno
> Inter minora sidera.

How perfectly simple the words, and yet it was as if the splendour of the heavens had broken upon me—rather, in some strange way, within me. And that, I suppose, is the real function of descriptive poetry—not to present a detailed scene to the eye, but in its mysterious manner to sink our sense of individual life in this larger sympathy with the world. Now and then, no doubt, Browning, too, strikes this universal note, as, for instance, in those lines from *Paracelsus* already quoted. But for the most part, his description, like his lyrical passion, is adapted with remarkable skill towards individualising still further the problem or character that he is analysing. Take that famous passage in *Easter-Day :*

> And as I said
> This nonsense, throwing back my head

With light complacent laugh, I found
Suddenly all the midnight round
One fire. The dome of heaven had stood
As made up of a multitude
Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack
Of ripples infinite and black,
From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
Like horror and astonishment,
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment), "There—
Burn it!" And straight I was aware
That the whole ribwork round, minute
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted, each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven. . . .

We are far enough from the "Nox erat" of Horace or even the "trunks that glare like grates of hell"; we are seeing the world with the eye of a man whose mind is perplexed and whose imagination is narrowed down by terror to a single question: "How hard it is to be A Christian!"

And nothing, perhaps, confirms this impression of a body of writing which is neither quite prose nor quite poetry more than the rhythm of Browning's verse. Lady Burne-Jones in the Memorials of her husband tells of meeting the poet at Denmark Hill, when some talk went on about the rate at which the pulse of different people beat. Browning suddenly leaned toward her, saying,

"Do me the honour to feel my pulse"—but to her surprise there was none to feel. His pulse was, in fact, never perceptible to touch. The notion may seem fantastic, but, in view of certain recent investigations of psychology into the relation between our pulse and our sense of rhythm, I have wondered whether the lack of any regular systole and diastole in Browning's verse may not rest on a physical basis. There is undoubtedly a kind of proper motion in his language, but it is neither the regular rise and fall of verse nor the more loosely balanced cadences of prose; or, rather, it vacillates from one movement to the other, in a way which keeps the rhythmically trained ear in a state of acute tension. But it has at least the interest of corresponding curiously to the writer's trick of steering between the elevation of poetry and the analysis of prose. It rounds out completely our impression of watching the most expert funambulist in English letters. Nor is there anything strange in this intimate relation between the content of his writing and the mechanism of his metre. "The purpose of rhythm," says Mr. Yeats in a striking passage of one of his essays, "it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety." That is the neo-Celt's mystical way of putting a truth that all have felt—the fact that the regular

sing-song of verse exerts a species of enchantment on the senses, lulling to sleep the individual within us and translating our thoughts and emotions into something significant of the larger experience of mankind.

But I would not leave this aspect of Browning's work without making a reservation which may seem to some (though wrongly, I think) to invalidate all that has been said. For it does happen now and again that he somehow produces the unmistakable exaltation of poetry through the very exaggeration of his unpoetical method. Nothing could be more indirect, more oblique, than his way of approaching the climax in *Cleon*. The ancient Greek poet, writing "from the sprinkled isles, Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea," answers certain queries of Protus the Tyrant. He contrasts the insufficiency of the artistic life with that of his master, and laments bitterly the vanity of pursuing ideal beauty when the goal at the end is only death:

> It is so horrible,
> I dare at times imagine to my need
> Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
> Unlimited in capability
> For joy, as this is in desire for joy.
> . . . . . But no!
> Zeus has not yet revealed it; and alas,
> He must have done so, were it possible!

The poem, one begins to suspect, is a specimen of Browning's peculiar manner of indirection; in

reality, through this monologue, suspended delicately between self-examination and dramatic confession, he is focussing in one individual heart the doom of the great civilisation that is passing away and the splendid triumph of the new. And then follows the climax, as it were an accidental afterthought:

> And for the rest,
> I cannot tell thy messenger aright
> Where to deliver what he bears of thine
> To one called Paulus; we have heard his fame
> Indeed, if Christus be not one with him—
> *I know not, nor am troubled much to know.*
> Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,
> As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,
> Hath access to a secret shut from us?
> Thou wrongest our philosophy, O King,
> In stooping to inquire of such an one,
> As if his answer could impose at all!
> *He writeth, doth he? well, and he may write.*
> Oh, the Jew findeth scholars! certain slaves
> Who touched on this same isle, preached him and Christ;
> And (as I gathered from a bystander)
> Their doctrine could be held by no sane man.

It is not revoking what has been said to admit that the superb audacity of the indirection in these underscored lines touches on the sublime; the individual is involuntarily rapt into communion with the great currents that sweep through human affairs, and the interest of psychology is lost in the elevation of poetry. At the same time it ought to be added that this effect

would scarcely have been possible were not the rhythm and the mechanism of the verse unusually free of Browning's prosaic mannerism.

It might seem that enough had been said to explain why Browning is popular. The attitude of the ordinary intelligent reader toward him is, I presume, easily stated. A good many of Browning's mystifications, *Sordello*, for one, he simply refuses to bother himself with. *Le jeu*, he says candidly, *ne vaut pas les chandelles*. Other works he goes through with some impatience, but with an amount of exhilarating surprise sufficient to compensate for the annoyances. If he is trained in literary distinctions, he will be likely to lay down the book with the exclamation: *C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la poésie!* And probably such a distinction will not lessen his admiration; for it cannot be asserted too often that the reading public to-day is ready to accede to any legitimate demand on its analytical understanding, but that it responds sluggishly, or only spasmodically, to that readjustment of the emotions necessary for the sustained enjoyment of such a poem as *Paradise Lost*. But I suspect that we have not yet touched the real heart of the problem. All this does not explain that other phase of Browning's popularity, which depends upon anything but the common sense of the average reader; and, least of all, does it account for the library of books, of which Professor Herford's is the latest example. There is another public which craves

a different food from the mere display of human nature; it is recruited largely by the women's clubs and by men who are unwilling or afraid to hold their minds in a state of self-centred expectancy toward the meaning of a civilisation shot through by threads of many ages and confused colours; it is kept in a state of excitation by critics who write lengthily and systematically of "joy in soul." Now there is a certain philosophy which is in a particular way adapted to such readers and writers. Its beginnings, no doubt, are rooted in the naturalism of Rousseau and the eighteenth century, but the flower of it belongs wholly to our own age. It is the philosophy whose purest essence may be found distilled in Browning's magical alembic, and a single drop of it will affect the brain of some people with a strange giddiness.

And here again I am tempted to abscond behind those blessed words *Platonische Ideen* and *Begriffe*, *universalia ante rem* and *universalia post rem*, which offer so convenient an escape from the difficulty of meaning what one says. It would be so easy with those counters of German metaphysicians and the schoolmen to explain how it is that Browning has a philosophy of generalised notions, and yet so often misses the form of generalisation special to the poet. The fact is his philosophy is not so much inherent in his writing as imposed on it from the outside. His theory of love does not expand like Dante's into a great

vision of life wherein symbol and reality are fused together, but is added as a commentary on the action or situation. And on the other hand he does not accept the simple and pathetic incompleteness of life as a humbler poet might, but must try with his reason to reconcile it with an ideal system:

> Over the ball of it,
> Peering and prying,
> How I see all of it,
> Life there, outlying!
> Roughness and smoothness,
> Shine and defilement,
> Grace and uncouthness:
> One reconcilement.

Yet "ideal" and "reconcilement" are scarcely the words; for Browning's philosophy, when detached, as it may be, from its context, teaches just the acceptance of life in itself as needing no conversion into something beyond its own impulsive desires:

> Let us not always say,
> "Spite of this flesh to-day
> I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
> As the bird wings and sings,
> Let us cry, "All good things
> Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!"

Passion to Shakespeare was the source of tragedy; there is no tragedy, properly speaking, in Browning, for the reason that passion is to him

essentially good. By sheer bravado of human emotion we justify our existence, nay—

> We have to live alone to set forth well
> God's praise.

His notion of "moral strength," as Professor Santayana so forcibly says, " is a blind and miscellaneous vehemence."

But if all the passions have their own validity, one of them in particular is the power that moves through all and renders them all good:

> In my own heart love had not been made wise
> To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
> To know even hate is but a mask of love's.

It is the power that reaches up from earth to heaven, and the divine nature is no more than a higher, more vehement manifestation of its energy:

> For the loving worm within its clod
> Were diviner than a loveless god.

And in the closing vision of *Saul* this thought of the identity of man's love and God's love is uttered by David in a kind of delirious ecstasy:

> 'T is the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
> In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
> A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
> Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand
> Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!

But there is no need to multiply quotations. The point is that in all Browning's rhapsody there is nowhere a hint of any break between the lower and the higher nature of man, or between the human and the celestial character. Not that his philosophy is pantheistic, for it is Hebraic in its vivid sense of God's distinct personality; but that man's love is itself divine, only lesser in degree. There is nothing that corresponds to the tremendous words of Beatrice to Dante when he meets her face to face in the Terrestrial Paradise:

> Guardami ben : ben son, ben son Beatrice.
> Come degnasti d' accedere al monte?
> Non sapei tu che qui è l'uom felice?

(Behold me well: Io, Beatrice am I.
And thou, how daredst thou to this mount draw nigh?
Knew'st thou not here was man's felicity?)—

nothing that corresponds to the "scot of penitence," the tears, and the plunge into the river of Lethe before the new, transcendent love begins. Indeed, the point of the matter is not that Browning magnifies human love in its own sphere of beauty, but that he speaks of it with the voice of a prophet of spiritual things and proclaims it as a complete doctrine of salvation. Often, as I read the books on Browning's gospel of human passion, my mind recurs to that scene in the Gospel of St. John, wherein it is told how a certain Nicodemus of the Pharisees came to Jesus by night and was puzzled by the hard saying: "Except a man

be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." There is no lack of confessions from that day to this of men to whom it has seemed that they were born again, and always, I believe, the new birth, like the birth of the body, was consummated with wailing and anguish, and afterwards the great peace. This is a mystery into which it is no business of mine to enter, but with the singularly uniform record of these confessions in my memory, I cannot but wonder at the light message of the new prophet: "If you desire faith —then you 've faith enough," and "For God is glorified in man." I am even sceptical enough to believe that the vaunted conclusion of *Fifine at the Fair*, "I end with—Love is all and Death is naught," sounds like the wisdom of a schoolgirl. There is an element in Browning's popularity which springs from those readers who are content to look upon the world as it is; they feel the power of his lyric song when at rare intervals it flows in pure and untroubled grace, and they enjoy the intellectual legerdemain of his suspended psychology. But there is another element in that popularity (and this, unhappily, is the inspiration of the clubs and of the formulating critics) which is concerned too much with this flattering substitute for spirituality. Undoubtedly, a good deal of restiveness exists under what is called the materialism of modern life, and many are looking in this way and that for an escape into the purer joy which they hear has passed from the world.

It used to be believed that Calderon was a bearer of the message, Calderon who expressed the doctrine of the saints and the poets:

> Pues el delito mayor
> Del hombre es haber nacido—

(since the greatest transgression of man is to have been born). It was believed that the spiritual life was bought with a price, and that the desires of this world must first suffer a permutation into something not themselves. I am not holding a brief for that austere doctrine; I am not even sure that I quite understand it, although it is written at large in many books. But I do know that those who think they have found its equivalent in the poetry of Browning are misled by wandering and futile lights. The secret of his more esoteric fame is just this, that he dresses a worldly and easy philosophy in the forms of spiritual faith and so deceives the troubled seekers after the higher life.

It is not pleasant to be convicted of throwing stones at the prophets, as I shall appear to many to have done. My only consolation is that, if the prophet is a true teacher, these stones of the casual passer-by merely raise a more conspicuous monument to his honour; but if he turns out in the end to be a false prophet (as I believe Browning to have been)—why, then, let his disciples look to it.

A NOTE ON BYRON'S "DON JUAN"

It has often been a source of wonder to me that I was able to read and enjoy Byron's *Don Juan* under the peculiar circumstances attending my introduction to that poem. I had been walking in the Alps, and after a day of unusual exertion found myself in the village of Chamouni, fatigued and craving rest. A copy of the Tauchnitz edition fell into my hands, and there, in a little room, through a summer's day, by a window which looked full upon the unshadowed splendour of Mont Blanc, I sat and read, and only arose when Juan faded out of sight with "the phantom of her frolic Grace—Fitz-Fulke." I have often wondered, I say, why the incongruity of that solemn Alpine scene with the mockery of Byron's wit did not cause me to shut the book and thrust it away, for in general I am highly sensitive to the nature of my surroundings while reading. Only recently, on taking up the poem again for the purpose of editing it, did the answer to that riddle occur to me, and with it a better understanding of the place of *Don Juan* among the great epics which might have seemed in finer accord with the sublimity and peace of that memorable day.

In one respect, at least, it needed no return to

Byron's work to show how closely it is related in spirit to the accepted canons of the past. These poets, who have filled the world with their rumour, all looked upon life with some curious obliquity of vision. We, who have approached the consummation of the world's hope, know that happiness and peace and the fulfilment of desires are about to settle down and brood for ever more over the lot of mankind, but with them it seems to have been otherwise. Who can forget the recurring *minynthadion* of Homer, in which he summed up for the men of his day the vanity of long aspirations? So if we were asked to point out the lines of Shakespeare that express most completely his attitude toward life, we should probably quote that soliloquy of Hamlet wherein he catalogues the evils of existence, and only in the fear of future dreams finds a reason for continuance; or we should cite that sonnet of disillusion: "Tired with all these for restful death I cry." And as for the lyric poets, sooner or later the lament of Shelley was wrung from the lips of each:

> Out of the day and night
> A joy has taken flight:
> Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar
> Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
> No more—oh, never more!

This, I repeat, is a strange fact, for it appears that these poets, prophets who spoke in the

language of beauty and who have held the world's reverence so long—it appears now that these interpreters of the fates were all misled. Possibly, as Aristotle intimated, genius is allied to some vice of the secretions which produces a melancholia of the brain; something like this, indeed, only expressed in more recondite terms, may be found in the most modern theory of science. But more probably they wrote merely from insufficient experience, not having perceived how the human race with increase of knowledge grows in happiness. Thus, at least, it seems to one who observes the tides of thought. Next year, or the next, some divine invention shall come which will prove this melancholy of the poets to have been only a childish ignorance of man's sublimer destiny; some discovery of a new element more wonderful than radium will render the ancient brooding over human feebleness a matter of laughter and astonishment; some acceptance of the larger brotherhood of the race will wipe away all tears and bring down upon earth the fair dream of heaven, a reality and a possession for ever; some new philosophy of the soul will convert the old poems of conflict into meaningless fables, stale and unprofitable. Already we see the change at hand. To how many persons today does Browning appeal—though they would not always confess it — more powerfully than Homer or Milton or any other of the great names of antiquity? And the reason of this closer appeal

of Browning is chiefly the unflagging optimism of his philosophy, his full-blooded knowledge and sympathy which make the wailings of the past somewhat silly in our ears, if truth must be told. I never read Browning but those extraordinary lines of Euripides recur to my mind: "Not now for the first time do I regard mortal things as a shadow, nor would I fear to charge with supreme folly those artificers of words who are reckoned the sages of mankind, for no man among mortals is happy." *Θνητῶν γὰρ οὐδείς ἐστιν εὐδαίμων*, indeed!—would any one be shameless enough to utter such words under the new dispensation of official optimism?

It is necessary to think of these things before we attempt to criticise Byron, for *Don Juan*, too, despite its marvellous vivacity, looks upon life from the old point of view. Already, for this reason in part, it seems a little antiquated to us, and in a few years it may be read only as a curiosity. Meanwhile for the few who lag behind in the urgent march of progress the poem will possess a special interest just because it presents the ancient thesis of the poets and prophets in a novel form. Of course, in many lesser matters it makes a wider and more lasting appeal. Part of the Haidée episode, for instance, is so exquisitely lovely, so radiant with the golden haze of youth, that even in the wiser happiness of our maturity we may still turn to it with a kind of complacent delight. Briefer passages scattered here and

there, such as the "'T is sweet to hear," and the "Ave Maria," need only a little abridgment at the close to fit them perfectly for any future anthology devoted to the satisfaction and the ultimate significance of human emotions. But, strangely enough, these disturbing climaxes, which will demand to be forgotten, or to be rearranged as we restore old mutilated statues, do, indeed, point to those very qualities which render the poem so extraordinary a complement to the great and accepted epics of the past. For the present it may yet be sufficient to consider *Don Juan* as it is—with all its enormities upon it.

And, first of all, we shall make a sad mistake if we regard the poem as a mere work of satire. Occasionally Byron pretends to lash himself into a righteous fury over the vices of the age, but we know that this is all put on, and that the real savageness of his nature comes out only when he thinks of his own personal wrongs. Now this is a very different thing from the deliberate and sustained denunciation of a vicious age such as we find in Juvenal, a different thing utterly from the *sæva indignatio* that devoured the heart and brain of poor Swift. There is in *Don Juan* something of the personal satire of Pope, and something of the whimsical mockery of Lucilius and his imitators. But it needs but a little discernment to see that Byron's poem has vastly greater scope and significance than the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, or the spasmodic gaiety of the Menip-

pean satire. It does in its own way present a view of life as a whole, with the good and the evil, and so passes beyond the category of the merely satirical. The very scope of its subject, if nothing more, classes it with the more universal epics of literature rather than with the poems that portray only a single aspect of life.

Byron himself was conscious of this, and more than once alludes to the larger aspect of his work. "If you must have an epic," he once said to Medwin, "there 's *Don Juan* for you; it is an epic as much in the spirit of our day as the *Iliad* was in that of Homer." And in one of the asides in the poem itself he avows the same design:

> A panoramic view of Hell's in training,
> After the style of Virgil and of Homer,
> So that my name of Epic 's no misnomer.

Hardly the style of those stately writers, to be sure, but an epic after its own fashion the poem certainly is. That Byron's way is not the way of the older poets requires no emphasis; they

> reveled in the fancies of the time,
> True Knights, chaste Dames, huge Giants, Kings despotic;
> But all these, save the last, being obsolete,
> I chose a modern subject as more meet.

Being cut off from the heroic subjects of the established school, he still sought to obtain something of the same large and liberating effect through the use of a frankly modern theme.

The task was not less difficult than his success was singular and marked; and that is why it seemed in no way inappropriate, despite its occasional lapse of licentiousness, to read *Don Juan* with the white reflection of Mont Blanc streaming through the window. Homer might have been so read, or Virgil, or any of those poets who presented life solemnly and magniloquently; I do not think I could have held my mind to Juvenal or Pope or even Horace beneath the calm radiance of that Alpine light.

I have said that the great poets all took a sombre view of the world. Man is but *the dream of a shadow*, said Pindar, speaking for the race of genius, and Byron is conscious of the same insight into the illusive spectacle. He has looked with like vision upon

> this scene of all-confessed inanity,
> By Saint, by Sage, by Preacher, and by Poet,

and will not in his turn refrain "from holding up the nothingness of life." So in the introduction to the seventh canto he runs through the list of those who have preached and sung this solemn, but happily to us outworn, theme:

> I say no more than hath been said in Dante's
> Verse, and by Solomon and by Cervantes.

It must not be supposed, however, because the heroic poems of old were touched with the pettiness and sadness of human destiny, that their influence on the reader was supposed to be narrow-

ing or depressing; the name "heroic" implies the contrary of that. Indeed their very inspiration was derived from the fortitude of a spirit struggling to rise above the league of little things and foiling despairs. It may seem paradoxical to us, yet it is true that these morbid poets believed in the association of men with gods and in the grandeur of mortal passions. So Achilles and Hector, both with the knowledge of their brief destiny upon them, both filled with foreboding of frustrate hopes, strive nobly to the end of magnanimous defeat. There lay the greatness of the heroic epos for readers of old,—the sense of human littleness, the melancholy of broken aspirations, swallowed up in the transcending sublimity of man's endurance and daring. And men of lesser mould, who knew so well the limitations of their sphere, took courage and were taught to look down unmoved upon their harassed fate.

Now Byron came at a time of transition from the old to the new. The triumphs of material discovery, "*Le magnifiche sorti e progressive*," had not yet cast a reproach on the earlier sense of life's futility, while at the same time the faith in heroic passions had passed away. An attempt to create an epic in the old spirit would have been doomed, was indeed doomed in the hands of those who undertook it. The very language in which Byron presents the ancient universal belief of Plato and those others

> Who knew this life was not worth a potato,—

shows how far he was from the loftier mode of imagination. In place of heroic passion he must seek another outlet of relief, another mode of purging away melancholy; and the spirit of the burlesque came lightly to his use as the only available *vis medica*. The feeling was common to his age, but he alone was able to adapt the motive to epic needs. How often the melancholy sentimentality of Heine corrects itself by a burlesque conclusion! Or, if we regard the novel, how often does Thackeray in like manner replace the old heroic relief of passion by a kindly smile at the brief and busy cares of men. But neither Heine nor Thackeray carries the principle of the burlesque to its artistic completion, or makes it the avowed motive of a complicated action, as Byron does in *Don Juan*. That poem is indeed "prolific of melancholy merriment." It is not necessary to point out at length the persistence of this mock-heroic spirit. Love, ambition, home-attachments, are all burlesqued; battle ardour, the special theme of epic sublimity, is subjected to the same quizzical mockery:

> There was not now a luggage boy, but sought
> Danger and spoil with ardour much increased;
> And why? because a little—odd—old man,
> Stripped to his shirt, was come to lead the van.

In the gruesome shipwreck scene the tale of suffering which leads to cannibalism is interrupted thus:

> At length they caught two Boobies, and a Noddy,
> And then they left off eating the dead body.

The description of London town as seen from Shooter's Hill ends with this absurd metaphor:

> A huge, dun Cupola, like a foolscap crown
> On a fool's head—and there is London Town!

Even Death laughs,—death that "*hiatus maxime deflendus*," "the dunnest of all duns," etc. And, last of all, the poet turns the same weapon against his own art. Do the lines for a little while grow serious, he suddenly pulls himself up with a sneer:

> Here I must leave him, for I grow pathetic,
> Moved by the Chinese nymph of tears, green tea!

I trust, however, it has been made sufficiently clear that *Don Juan* is something quite different from the mere mock-heroic—from Pulci, for instance, "sire of the half-serious rhyme," whom Byron professed to imitate. The poem is in a sense not half but wholly serious, for the very reason that it takes so broad a view of human activity, and because of its persistent moral sense. (Which is nowise contradicted by the immoral scenes in several of the cantos.) It is not, for example, possible to think of finding in Pulci such a couplet as this:

> But almost sanctify the sweet excess
> By the immortal wish and power to bless.

He who could write such lines as those was not

merely indulging his humour. *Don Juan* is something more than

> A versified Aurora Borealis,
> Which flashes o'er a waste and icy clime.

Out of the bitterness of his soul, out of the wreck of his passions which, though heroic in intensity, had ended in quailing of the heart, he sought what the great makers of epic had sought,—a solace and a sense of uplifted freedom. The heroic ideal was gone, the refuge of religion was gone; but, passing to the opposite extreme, by showing the power of the human heart to mock at all things, he would still set forth the possibility of standing above and apart from all things. He, too, went beyond the limitations of destiny by laughter, as Homer and Virgil and Milton had risen by the imagination. And, in doing this, he wrote the modern epic.

We are learning a new significance of human life, as I said; and the sublime audacities of the elder poets in attempting to transcend the melancholia of their day are growing antiquated, just as Byron's heroic mockery is turning stale. In a few years we shall have come so much closer to the mysteries over which the poets bungled helplessly, that we can afford to forget their rhapsodies. Meanwhile it may not be amiss to make clear to ourselves the purpose and character of one of the few, the very few, great poems in our literature.

LAURENCE STERNE

A NUMBER of excellent editions of our standard authors have been put forth during the last two or three years, but none of them, perhaps, has been of such real service to letters as the new Sterne edited by Professor Wilbur L. Cross.[1]

Ordinarily the fresh material advertised in these editions is in large measure rubbish which had been deliberately discarded by the author and whose resuscitation is an impertinence to his memory. Certainly this is true of Murray's new Byron; it is in part true of the great editions of Hazlitt and Lamb recently published, to go no further afield. But with Sterne the case is different. The *Journal to Eliza* and the letters now first printed in full from the "Gibbs manuscript" are a genuine aid in getting at the heart of Sterne's elusive character. Even more important is the readjustment of dates for the older correspondence, which the present editor has accomplished at the cost of considerable pains, for the setting back of a letter two years may make all the differ-

[1] *The Complete Works of Laurence Sterne.* Edited by Wilbur L. Cross. Supplemented with the Life by Percy Fitzgerald. 12 volumes. New York: J. F. Taylor & Co. 1904.

ence between a lying knave and an unstable sentimentalist. In the spring of 1767, just a year before his death, Sterne was inditing those rather sickly letters and the newly published *Journal* to Eliza, a susceptible young woman who was about to sail for India. "The coward," says Thackeray, "was writing gay letters to his friends this while, with sneering allusions to his poor foolish *Brahmine*. Her ship was not out of the Downs, and the charming Sterne was at the 'Mount Coffee-House,' with a sheet of gilt-edged paper before him, offering that precious treasure, his heart, to Lady P——." It is an ugly charge, and indeed Thackeray's whole portrait of the humourist is harshly painted. But Sterne was not sneering in other letters at his "Brahmine," as he called the rather spoiled East India lady, and it turns out from some very pretty calculations of Professor Cross that the particular note to Lady P[ercy] must have been written at the Mount Coffee-House two years before he ever knew Eliza. "Coward," "wicked," "false," "wretched worn-out old scamp," "mountebank," "foul Satyr," "the last words the famous author wrote were bad and wicked, the last lines the poor stricken wretch penned were for pity and pardon" —for shame, Mr. Thackeray! Sterne was a weak man, one may admit; wretched and worn-out he was when the final blow struck him in his lonely hired room; but is there no pity and pardon on your pen for the wayward penitent? You had

sympathy enough and facile tears enough for the genial Costigans and the others who followed their hearts too readily; have you no *Alas, poor Yorick!* for the author who gave you these characters? You could smile at Pendennis when he used the old songs for a second love; was it a terrible thing that Yorick should have taken passages from his early letters (copies of which were thriftily preserved after the fashion of the day) and sent them as the bubblings of fresh emotion at the end of his life? "One solitary plate, one knife, one fork, one glass!—I gave a thousand pensive, penetrating looks at the chair thou hadst so often graced, in those quiet and sentimental repasts—then laid down my knife and fork, and took out my handkerchief, and clapped it across my face, and wept like a child"—he wrote to Miss Lumley who afterwards became Mrs. Sterne; and in the *Journal* kept for Eliza when he was broken in spirit and near to death, you may read the same words, as Thackeray read them in manuscript, and you may call them false and lying; but I am inclined to believe they were quite as genuine as most of the pathos of that lachrymose age. The want of sympathy in Thackeray's case is the harder to understand for the reason that to Sterne more than to any other of the eighteenth-century wits he would seem to owe his style and his turn of thought. On many a page his peculiar sentiment reads like a direct imitation of *Tristram Shandy;* add but a touch

of caprice to Colonel Newcome and you might almost imagine my Uncle Toby parading in the nineteenth century; and I think it is just the lack of this whimsical touch that makes the good colonel a little mawkish to many readers. And if one is to look for an antetype of Thackeray's exquisite English, whither shall one turn unless to the *Sermons* of Mr. Yorick? There is a taint of ingratitude in his affectation of being shocked at the irregularities of one to whom he was so much indebted, and I fear Mr. Thackeray was too consciously appealing to the Philistine prejudices of the good folk who were listening to his lectures. Afterwards, when the mischief was done, he suffered what looks like a qualm of conscience. In one of the *Roundabout Papers* he tells how he slept in Sterne's old hotel at Calais: "When I went to bed in the room, in *his* room, when I think how I admire, dislike, and have abused him, a certain dim feeling of apprehension filled my mind at the midnight hour. What if I should see his lean figure in the black-satin breeches, his sinister smile, his long thin finger pointing to me in the moonlight!" Unfortunately the popular notion of Sterne is still based almost exclusively on the picture of him in the *English Humourists*.

It is to be hoped that at last this carefully prepared edition will do something toward dispelling that false impression. Certainly, the various introductions furnished by Professor Cross are admirable for their fairness and insight. He does

not attempt a panegyric of Sterne, as did Mr. Fitzgerald in the first edition of the *Life*, nor does he awkwardly overlay panegyric with censure, as these are found in the present revised form of that narrative; he recognises the errors of the sentimentalist, but he does not call them by exaggerated names. And he sees, too, the fundamental sincerity of the man, knowing that no great book was ever penned without that quality, whatever else might be missing. I think he will account it for service in a good cause if, as an essayist taking my material where it may be found, I try to draw a little closer still to the sly follower of Rabelais whom he has honoured by so elaborate a study.

Possibly Professor Cross does not recognise fully enough the influence of Sterne's early years on his character. It is indeed a vagrant and Shandean childhood to which the Rev. Mr. Laurence Sterne introduces us in the *Memoir* written late in life for the benefit of his daughter Lydia. The father, a lieutenant in Handaside's regiment, passed from engagement to idleness, and from barrack to barrack, more than was the custom even in those unsettled days. At Clonmel, in the south of Ireland, November 24, 1713, Laurence was born, a few days after the arrival of his mother from Dunkirk. Other children had been given to the luckless couple, and were yet to be added, but here and there they were dropped on the wayside in pathetic graves, leaving in the end only two, the future novelist and his sister

Catherine, who married a publican in London and became estranged from her brother by her "uncle's wickedness and her own folly"—says Laurence. Of the mother it is not necessary to say much. The difficulties of her life as a hanger-on in camps seem to have hardened her, and her temper ("clamorous and rapacious," he called it) was in all points unlike her son's. That Sterne neglected her brutally is a charge as old as Walpole's scandalous tongue, and Byron, taking his cue from thence, gave piquancy to the accusation by saying that "he preferred whining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother." Sterne's minute refutation of the slander may now be read at full length in a letter to the very uncle who set the tale agoing. The boy would seem to have taken the father's mercurial temperament, though not his physique:

> The regiment [he writes] was sent to defend Gibraltar, at the siege, where my father was run through the body by Capt. Phillips, in a duel (the quarrel began about a goose!): with much difficulty he survived, though with an impaired constitution, which was not able to withstand the hardships it was put to; for he was sent to Jamaica, where he soon fell by the country fever, which took away his senses first, and made a child of him; and then, in a month or two, walking about continually without complaining, till the moment he sat down in an armchair, and breathed his last, which was at Port Antonio, on the north of the island. My father was a little smart man, active to the last degree in all exercises, most patient of fatigue and disappointments, of which it pleased God to give him full measure. He was, in his

temper, somewhat rapid and hasty, but of a kindly, sweet disposition, void of all design; and so innocent in his own intentions, that he suspected no one; so that you might have cheated him ten times in a day, if nine had not been sufficient for your purpose.

Lieutenant Sterne died in 1731, and it would require but a few changes in the son's record to make it read like a page from *Henry Esmond;* the very texture of the language, the turn of the quizzical pathos, are Thackeray's.

Laurence at this time was at school near Halifax, where he got into a characteristic scrape. The ceiling of the schoolroom had been newly whitewashed; the ladder was standing, and the boy mounted it and wrote in large letters, LAU. STERNE. The usher whipped him severely, but, says the *Memoir*, "my master was very much hurt at this, and said, before me, that never should that name be effaced, for I was a boy of genius, and he was sure I should come to preferment." From Halifax Sterne went to Jesus College, Cambridge, at the expense of a cousin. An uncle at York next took charge of him and got him the living of Sutton, and afterwards the Prebendary of York. Just how he came to quarrel with this patron we shall probably never know. Sterne himself declares that his uncle wished him to write political paragraphs for the Whigs, that he detested such "dirty work," and got his uncle's hatred in return for his independence. According to the writer of the *Yorkshire*

Anecdotes, the two fell out over a woman—which sounds more like the truth. Meanwhile, Laurence had been successfully courting Miss Elizabeth Lumley at York, and, during her absence, had been writing those love-letters which his daughter published after the death of her parents, to the immense increase of sentimentalism throughout the United Kingdom. They are, in sooth, but a sickly, hothouse production, though honestly enough meant, no doubt. The writer, too, kept a copy of them, and thriftily made use of select passages at a later date, as we have seen. Miss Lumley became Mrs. Sterne in due time, and brought to her husband a modest jointure, and another living at Stillington, so that he was now a pluralist, although far from rich. The marriage was not particularly happy. Madam, one gathers, was pragmatic and contentious and unreasonable, her reverend spouse was volatile and pleasure-loving; and when, in the years of Yorick's fame, they went over to France, she decided to stay there with her daughter. Sterne seems to have been fond of her always, in a way, and in money matters was never anything but generous and tactfully considerate. A bad-hearted man is not so thoughtful of his wife's comfort after she has left him, as Sterne's letters show him to have been; and even Thackeray admits that his affection for the girl was "artless, kind, affectionate, and *not* sentimental."

But the lawful Mrs. Sterne was not the only

woman at whose feet the parson of Sutton and Stillington was sighing. There was that Mlle. de Fourmantelle, a Huguenot refugee, the "dear, dear Kitty" (or "Jenny" as she becomes in *Tristram Shandy*), to whom he sends presents of wine and honey (with notes asking, "What is honey to the sweetness of thee?"), and who followed him to London in the heyday of his fame, where somehow she fades mysteriously out of view. "I myself must ever have some Dulcinea in my head," he said; "it harmonises the soul." And, in truth, the soul of Yorick was mewed in the cage of his breast very near his heart, and never stretched her wings out of that close atmosphere. Charity was his creed in the pulpit, and his love of woman had a curious and childlike way of fortifying the Christian love of his neighbour. Most famous of all was his passion—it seems almost to have been a passion in this case—for the famous "Eliza." Towards the end of his life he had become warmly attached to a certain William James, a retired Indian commodore, and his wife, who were the best and most wholesome of his friends. At their London home he met Mrs. Elizabeth Draper, and soon became romantically attached to her. When the time drew near for her to sail to India to rejoin her husband, he wrote a succession of notes in a kind of paroxysm of grief for himself and anxiety for her, and for several months afterwards he kept a journal of his emotions for her benefit some day. He was dead

in less than a year. The letters she kept, and in due time printed, because it was rumoured that Lydia was to publish them from copies—a pretty bit of wrangling among all these women there was, over the sentimental relics of poor Yorick! The *Journal* is now for the first time included in the author's works—a singular document, as eccentric in spelling and grammar as the sentiment is hard to define, a wild and hysterical record. But it rings true on the whole, and confirms the belief that Sterne's feelings were genuine, however short-lived they may have been. The last letter to Eliza is pitiful with its tale of a broken body and a sick heart: "In ten minutes after I dispatched my letter, this poor, fine-spun frame of Yorick's gave way, and I broke a vessel in my breast, and could not stop the loss of blood till four this morning. I have filled all thy India handkerchiefs with it.—It came, I think, from my heart! I fell asleep through weakness. At six I awoke, with the bosom of my shirt steeped in tears." All through the *Journal* that follows are indications of wasted health and of the perplexities of life that were closing in upon him. Only at rare intervals the worries are forgotten, and we get a picture of serener moments. One day, July 2nd, he grows genuinely idyllic, and it may not be amiss to copy out his note just as he penned it:

But I am in the Vale of Coxwould & wish You saw in how princely a manner I live in it—tis a Land of Plenty

—I sit down alone to Venison, fish or wild fowl—or a couple of fowls—with curds, and strawberrys & cream, (and all the simple clean plenty w^{ch} a rich Vally can produce,—with a Bottle of wine on my right hand (as in Bond street) to drink y^{r} health—I have a hundred hens & chickens [he sometimes spelt it *chickings*] ab^{t} my yard—and not a parishoner catches a hare a rabbit or a Trout—but he brings it as an offering—In short tis a golden Vally—& will be the golden Age when You govern the rural feast, my Bramine, & are the Mistress of my table & spread it with elegancy and that natural grace & bounty wth w^{ch} heaven has distinguish'd You . . .

—Time goes on slowly — every thing stands still—hours seem days & days seem Years whilst you lengthen the Distance between us—from Madras to Bombay—I shall think it shortening—and then desire & expectation will be upon the rack again—come—come—

But Eliza never came until Yorick had gone on a longer journey than Bombay. In England once more, she traded on her relation to the famous writer, and then reviled him. She associated with John Wilkes, and afterwards with the Abbé Raynal, who writ an absurd, pompous eulogy on "the Lady who has been so celebrated as the Correspondent of Mr. Sterne." It is engraved on her tomb in Bristol Cathedral that "genius and benevolence were united in her"; but the long letter composed in the vein of Mrs. Montagu and now printed from her manuscript belies the first, and her behaviour after Sterne's death makes a mockery of the second.

All this new material throws light on a phase of this matter which cannot be avoided in any

discussion of Sterne's character: How far did his immorality actually extend? To Thackeray he was a "foul Satyr"; Bagehot thought he was merely an "old flirt," and others have seen various degrees of guilt in his philanderings. Now his relation to Eliza would seem to be pretty decisive of his character in this respect, and fortunately the evidence here published in full by Professor Cross leaves little room for doubt. There is, for one thing, an extraordinary letter which is given in facsimile from the rough draft, with all its erasures and corrections. It was addressed to Daniel Draper, but was never sent, apparently never completed. The substance of it is, to say the least, unusual:

> I own it, Sir, that the writing a letter to a gentleman I have not the honour to be known to—a letter likewise upon no kind of business (in the ideas of the world) is a little out of the common course of things—but I'm so myself, and the impulse which makes me take up my pen is out of the common way too, for it arises from the honest pain I should feel in having so great esteem and friendship as I bear for Mrs. Draper—if I did not wish to hope and extend it to Mr. Draper also. I am really, dear sir, in love with your wife; but 'tis a love you would honour me for, for 'tis so like that I bear my own daughter, who is a good creature, that I scarce distinguish a difference betwixt it—that moment I had would have been the last.

Follows a polite offer of services, which is nothing to our purpose.

Now it is easy to say that such a letter was

written with the hypocritical intention of allaying Mr. Draper's possible suspicions, and certainly the last sentence overshoots the mark. Against the general innocence of Sterne's life there exist, in particular, two damaging bits of evidence—that infamous thing in dog-Latin addressed to the master of the "Demoniacs," whose meaning must have been quite lost upon the daughter who published it, and a pair of brief notes to a woman named Hannah. Of the Latin letter one may say that it was probably written in the exaggerated tone of bravado suitable to its recipient; of both this and the notes one may add that they do not incriminate the later years of Sterne's life. As an offset we now have that extraordinary memorandum in the *Journal to Eliza*, dated April 24, 1767, which states explicitly, and convincingly, that he had led an entirely chaste life for the past fifteen years. It is not requisite, or indeed possible, to enter into the evidence further in this place, but the general inference may be stated with something like assurance: Sterne's relation to Eliza was purely sentimental, as was the case with most of his philandering; at the same time in his earlier years he had probably indulged in a life of pleasure such as was by no means uncommon among the clergy of his day. He was neither quite the lying scoundrel of Thackeray nor the "old flirt" of Bagehot, but a man led into many follies, and many kindnesses also, by an impulsive heart and a worldly philosophy. It is not his

immorality that one has to complain of, and the talk in the books on that score is mostly foolishness; it is rather his bad taste. He cannot be much blamed for his estrangement from his wife, and his care for her comfort is not a little to his credit; but he might have refrained from writing to Eliza on the happiness they were to enjoy when the poor woman was dead—as he had already done to Mlle. Fourmantelle, and others, too, it may be. Mrs. Sterne, not long after the departure of Eliza, had written that she was coming over to England, and the *Journal* for a time is filled with forebodings of the confusion she was to bring with her. One hardly knows whether to smile or drop a tear over the Postscript added after the last regular entry:

Nov: 1st All my dearest Eliza has turnd out more favourable than my hopes—Mrs S.—& my dear Girl have been 2 Months with me and they have this day left me to go to spend the Winter at York, after having settled every thing to their hearts content—Mrs Sterne retires into france, whence she purposes not to stir, till her death.—& never, has she vow'd, will give me another sorrowful or discontented hour—I have conquerd her, as I wd every one else, by humanity & Generosity—& she leaves me, more than half in Love wth me—She goes into the South of france, her health being insupportable in England—& her age, as she now confesses ten Years more, than I thought being on the edge of sixty—so God bless—& make the remainder of her Life happy—in order to wch I am to remit her three hundred guineas a year—& give my dear Girl two thousand pds—wth wch all

Joy, I agree to,—but tis to be sunk into an annuity in the french Loans—

—And now Eliza! Let me talk to thee—But What can I say, What can I write—But the Yearnings of heart wasted with looking & wishing for thy Return—Return —Return! my dear Eliza! May heaven smooth the Way for thee to send thee safely to us, & joy for Ever.

So ends the famous *Journal*, which at last we are permitted to read with all its sins upon it. And I think the first observation that will occur to every reader is surprise that a master of style could write such slipshod, almost illiterate, English. The fact is a good many of the writers of the day were content to leave all minor matters of grammar and orthography to their printer, whom it was then the fashion to abuse. More than one page of stately English out of that formal age would look as queer as Sterne's hectic scribblings, could we see the original manuscript. But the ill taste of it all is quite as apparent, and unfortunately no printer could expunge that fault, along with his haphazard punctuation, from Sterne's published works. In another way his incongruous calling as a priest may be responsible for a note that particularly jars upon us to-day. Too often in the midst of very earthly sentiments he breaks forth with a bit of religious claptrap, as when in the *Journal* he cries out, "Great God of Mercy! shorten the Space betwixt us—Shorten the space of our miseries!"—or as when, in that letter to Lady Percy which so

disgusted Thackeray, he dandles his temptations, and in the same breath tells how he has repeated the Lord's Prayer for the sake of deliverance from them. Again, I say, it is a matter of taste, for there is no reason to believe that Yorick's religious feelings were not just as sincere, and as volatile, too, as his love-making. They sometimes came to him at an inopportune moment.

"Un prêtre corrumpu ne l'est jamais à demi" —a priest is never only half corrupt—said Massillon, and there are times when such a saying is true. It is also true, and Sterne's life is witness thereof, that in certain ages, when compassion and tenderness of heart have taken the place of religion's austerer virtues, a man may preach with conviction on Sunday, and on Monday join without much disquiet of conscience in the revelries of a "Crazy" Castle. There is not a great deal for the moralist to say on such a life; it is a matter for the historian to explain. At Cambridge Sterne had made the acquaintance of John Hall Stevenson, the owner of Skelton, or "Crazy," Castle, which lay at Guisborough, within convenient reach of Sterne's Yorkshire homes. An excellent engraving in the present edition gives a fair notion of this fantastic dwelling before its restoration. On a fringe of land between the edge of what seems a stagnant pool and the foot of some barren hills, the old pile of stone sits dull and lowering. First comes a double terrace rising sheer from the water, and above that a rambling,

comfortless-looking structure, pierced in the upper story by a few solemn windows. Terraces and building alike are braced with outstanding buttresses, as if, like the House of Usher, the ancient edifice might some day split and crumble away into the lake. At one end of the pile is a heavy square tower erected long ago for defence; at the other stands a slender octagonal turret with its famous weathercock, by whose direction the owner regulated his mood for the day. The whole bears an aspect of bleakness and solitude, in startling contrast with the wild doings of host and guests. A study yet to be made is a history of the clubs or associations of the eighteenth century, which, in imitation, no doubt, of the newly instituted Masonic rites, were formed for the purpose of adding the sting of a fraternal secrecy to the commonplace pleasures of dissipation. Famous among these were the "Monks of Medmenham Abbey," and the "Hell-Fire Club," and to a less degree the "Demoniacs" whom Hall Stevenson gathered into his notorious abode. If Sterne found his amusement in this boisterous assembly, it is charitable (and the evidence points this way) to suppose that he enjoyed the jovial wit and grotesque pranks of such a company rather than its viciousness. It is at least remarkable that Hall Stevenson, or "Eugenius," as Sterne called him, seems to have tried to steady the eccentric divine by more than one piece of practical advice. Above all, there lay at Skelton a great collection of

Rabelaisian books, brought together by the owner during his tours on the Continent; and to this Sterne owed his eccentric reading and that acquaintance with the world's humours and whimsicalities which were to make his fortune.

Here, then, in the library of his compromising friend, he gathered the material for his great work, *Tristram Shandy;* and, indeed, if we credit some scholars, he gathered so successfully that little was left for his own creative talents. It is demonstrably true that he made extraordinary use of certain old French books, including Rabelais, whom he counted with Cervantes as his master; and from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* he borrowed unblushingly, not to mention other English authors. We are shocked at first to learn that some of his choicest passages are stolen goods; the recording angel's tear was shed, it appears, and my Uncle Toby's fly was released long before that gentleman was born to sweeten the world; so too the wind was tempered to the shorn lamb in proverb before Sterne ever added that text to the stock of biblical quotations. But after all, there is little to be gained by unearthing these plagiarisms. *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey* still remain among the most original productions in the language, and we are only taught once more that genius has a high-handed way of taking its own where it finds it.

The fact is that this trick of borrowing scarcely does more than affect a few of those set pieces or

purple patches by which an author like Sterne gradually comes to be known and judged. These are admirably adapted for use in anthologies, for they may be severed from their context without cutting a single artery or nerve; but let no one suppose that from reading them he gets anything but a distorted view of Sterne's work. They are all marked by a peculiar kind of artificial pathos —the recording angel's tear, Uncle Toby's fly, the dead ass, the caged starling, Maria of Moulines (I name them as they occur to me) —and they give a very imperfect notion of the true Shandean flavour. In their own genre they are no doubt masterpieces, but it is a genre which gives pleasure from the perception of the art, and not from the kindling touch of nature, in their execution. They are ostensibly pathetic, yet they make no appeal to the heart, and I doubt if a tear was every shed over any of them— even by the lachrymose Yorick himself. To enjoy them properly one must key his mind to that state in which the emotions cease to have validity in themselves, and are changed into a kind of exquisite convention. Now, it is easier by far to detect the inherent insubstantiality of such a convention than to appreciate its delicately balanced beauty, and thus it happens that we hear so much of Sterne's false sentiment from those who base their criticism primarily on these famous episodes. For my part I am almost inclined to place the story of Le Fevre in this class, and to wonder

if those who call it pathetic really mean that it has touched their heart; I am sure it never cost me a sigh.

No, the highest mastery of Sterne does not lie in these anthological patches, but first of all in his power of creating characters. There are not many persons engaged in the little drama of Shandy Hall, and their range of action is narrow, but they are drawn with a skill and a memorable distinctness which have never been surpassed. Not the bustling people of Shakespeare's stage are more real and individual than Mr. Shandy, my Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim, and Dr. Slop. Even the minor characters of the servants' hall are sketched in with wonderful vividness; and if there is a single failure in all that gallery of portraits, it is Yorick himself, who was drawn from the author and is foisted upon the company somewhat unceremoniously, if truth be told. Nor is the secret of their lifelikeness hard to discern. One of the constant creeds of the age, handed down from the old comedy of humours, was the belief in the "ruling passion" as the source of all a man's acts. The persons who figure in most of the contemporary letters and novels are a succession of originals or grotesques, moved by a single motive. They are all mad in England, said Hamlet, and Walpole enforces the sentence with a thousand burlesque anecdotes. Now in Sterne this ruling passion, both in his own character and in that of his creations, was softened

down to what may be called a whimsical egotism, which does not repel by its exaggeration, yet bestows a marvellous unity and relief. It is his *hobbyhorsical* philosophy, as he calls it. At the head of all are Tristram's father and uncle, with their cunningly contrasted humours—Mr. Shandy, who would regulate all the affairs of life by abstract theorems of the mind, and my Uncle Toby, who is guided solely by the impulses of the heart. Between them Sterne would seem to have set over against each other the two divided sources of human activity; and the minor characters, each with his cherished hobby, are ranged under them in proper subordination. The art of the narrative—and in this Sterne is without master or rival—is to bring these characters into a group by some common motive, and then to show how each of them is thinking all the while of his own dear crotchet. Take, for example, the tremendous curse of Ernulphus in the third book. Mr. Shandy had "the greatest veneration in the world for that gentleman, who, in distrust of his own discretion in this point, sat down and composed (that is, at his leisure) fit forms of swearing suitable to all cases, from the lowest to the highest provocation which could possibly happen to him." That is Mr. Shandy's theorising hobby, and accordingly, when his man Obadiah is the cause of an annoying mishap, Mr. Shandy reaches down the formal curse of Bishop Ernulphus and hands it to Dr. Slop to read. It might seem tedious to

have seven pages of excommunicative wrath thrust upon you, with the Latin text duly written out on the opposite page. On the contrary, this is one of the more entertaining scenes of the book, for at every step one or another of the listeners throws in an exclamation which intimates how the words are falling in with his own peculiar train of thought. The result is a delightful cross-section of human nature, as it actually exists. "Our armies swore terribly in *Flanders*, cried my Uncle *Toby*—but nothing to this.—For my own part, I could not have a heart to curse my dog so."

But it is not this persistent and very human egotism alone which makes the good people of Shandy Hall so real to us. Sterne is the originator and master of the gesture and the attitude. Like a skilful player of puppets, he both puts words into the mouths of his creatures and pulls the wires that move them. No one has ever approached him in the art with which he carries out every mood of the heart and every fancy of the brain into the most minute and precise posturing. Before Corporal Trim reads the sermon his exact attitude is described so that, as the author says, "a statuary might have modelled from it." Throughout all the dialogue between the two contrasted brothers we follow every movement of the speakers, as if we sat with them in the flesh, and when Mr. Shandy breaks his pipe the moment is tense with expectation. But the supreme ex-

hibition of this art occurs at the announcement of Bobby's death. Let us leave Mr. Shandy and my Uncle Toby discoursing over this sad event, and turn to the kitchen. Those who know the scene may pass on:

——My young master in *London* is dead! said Obadiah.—

——A green sattin night-gown of my mother's, which had been twice scoured, was the first idea which *Obadiah's* exclamation brought into *Susannah's* head. . . .

—O! 'twill be the death of my poor mistress, cried *Susannah*.—My mother's whole wardrobe followed.—What a procession! her red damask,—her orange tawney,—her white and yellow lutestrings,—her brown taffata,—her bone-laced caps, her bed-gowns, and comfortable under-petticoats.—Not a rag was left behind.—"*No,—she will never look up again*," said *Susannah*.

We had a fat, foolish scullion—my father, I think, kept her for her simplicity;—she had been all autumn struggling with a dropsy.—He is dead, said *Obadiah*,—he is certainly dead!—So am not I, said the foolish scullion.

——Here is sad news, *Trim*, cried *Susannah*, wiping her eyes as *Trim* stepp'd into the kitchen,—master *Bobby* is dead and *buried*—the funeral was an interpolation of *Susannah's*—we shall have all to go into mourning, said *Susannah*.

I hope not, said *Trim*.—You hope not! cried *Susannah* earnestly.—The mourning ran not in *Trim's* head, whatever it did in *Susannah's*.—I hope—said *Trim*, explaining himself, I hope in God the news is not true—I heard the letter read with my own ears, answered *Obadiah;* and we shall have a terrible piece of work of it in stubbing the Ox-moor.—Oh! he's dead, said *Susannah*.—As sure, said the scullion, as I 'm alive.

I lament for him from my heart and my soul, said *Trim*, fetching a sigh.—Poor creature!—poor boy!—poor gentleman!

—He was alive last *Whitsontide!* said the coachman.—*Whitsontide!* alas! cried *Trim*, extending his right arm, and falling instantly into the same attitude in which he read the sermon,—what is *Whitsontide, Jonathan* (for that was the coachman's name), or *Shrovetide*, or any tide or time past, to this? Are we not here now, continued the corporal (striking the end of his stick perpendicularly upon the floor, so as to give an idea of health and stability)—and are we not—(dropping his hat upon the ground) gone! in a moment!—'T was infinitely striking! *Susannah* burst into a flood of tears.—We are not stocks and stones.—*Jonathan, Obadiah*, the cook-maid, all melted.—The foolish fat scullion herself, who was scouring a fish-kettle upon her knees, was rous'd with it.—The whole kitchen crowded about the corporal.

There is the true Sterne. A common happening unites a half-dozen people in a sympathetic group, yet all the while each of them is living his individual life. You may look far and wide, but you will find nothing quite comparable to that fat, foolish scullion. And withal there is no touch of cynical satire in this display of egotism, but a kindly, quizzical sense of the way in which our human personalities are jumbled together in this strange world. And in the end the feeling that lies covered up in the heart of each, the feeling that all of us carry dumbly in the inevitable presence of death, is conveyed in that supreme gesture of Corporal Trim's, whose force in the book is

magnified by the author's fantastic disquisition on its precise nature and significance.

It begins to grow clear, I think, that we have here something more than an ordinary tale in which a few individuals are set apart to enact their rôles. Somehow, this quaint household in the country, where nothing more important is happening than the birth of a child, becomes a symbol of the great world with all its tangle of cross-purposes. There is a philosophy, a new and distinct vision of the meaning of life, in these scenes, which makes of Sterne something larger than a mere novelist. He was not indulging his author's vanity when he thought of himself as a follower of Rabelais and Cervantes and Swift, for he belongs with them rather than with his great contemporaries, Fielding and Smollet, or his greater successors, Thackeray and Dickens. Nor is his exact parentage hard to discover. In Rabelais I seem to see the embryonic humour of a world coming to the birth and not yet fully formed. Through the crust of the old mediæval ideals the new humanism was struggling to emerge, and in its first lusty liberty mankind, with the clog of the old civilisation still hanging upon it, was like those monsters that Nature threw off when she was preparing her hand for a higher creation. There is something unshaped, as of Milton's beast wallowing unwieldy, in the creatures of Rabelais's brain; yet withal one perceives the pride of the design that is foreshadowed and will

some day come to its own. Cervantes arose in the full tide of humanism, and there is about his humour the pathetic regret for an ideal that has been swept aside by the new forms. For this young civilisation, which spurned so haughtily the ancient law of humiliation and which was to be satisfied with the full and unconfined development of pure human nature, had a pitiful incompleteness to all but a few of Fortune's minions, and the memory of the past haunted the brain of Cervantes like a ghost vanquished and made ridiculous, but unwilling to depart. He found therein the tragic humour of man's ideal life. Then came Swift. Into his heart he sucked the bitterness of a thousand disappointments. Even the semblance of the old ideals had passed away, and for the fair promise of the new world he saw only corruption and folly and a gigantic egotism stalking in the disguise of liberty. Savage indignation laid hold of him and he vented his rage in that mocking laughter which stings the ears like a buffet. His was the sardonic humour. But time that takes away brings also its compensation. To Sterne, living among smaller men, these passionate egotisms are dwindled to mere caprices, and a jest becomes more appropriate than a sneer. And after all, one good thing is left. There is the kindly heart and the humble acknowledgment that we too are seeking our own petty ends. It is a world of homely chance into which Sterne introduces us, and there is no room

in it for the boisterous mirth or the tragedy or wrath of his predecessors. His humour is merely whimsical; his smile is almost a caress.

I can never look at that portrait of Sterne by Sir Joshua Reynolds, with the head thrown forward and the index finger of the right hand laid upon the forehead, but an extraordinary fantasy enters my mind. I seem to see one of those pictures of the Renaissance, in which the face of the Almighty beams benevolently out of the sky, but as I gaze, the features gradually change into those of Yorick. The mouth assumes the sly smile, and the eyes twinkle with conscious merriment, as if they were saying, "We know, you and I, but we won't tell!" Possibly it is something in the pose of Sir Joshua's picture which lends itself to this transformation, helped by a feeling that the Shandean world, over which Sterne presides, is at times as real as the actualities that surround us. That portrait at the head of his works is, so to speak, an image of His Sacred Majesty, Chance, whom a witty Frenchman reverenced as the genius of this world.

It may be that we do not always in our impatience recognise how artfully the caprices of Sterne's manner are adapted to creating this atmosphere of illusion. Now and then his trick of reaching a point by the longest way round, his wanton interruptions, the absurdity of his blank pages, and other cheap devices to appear original, grow a trifle wearisome, and we call the author a

mountebank for his pains. Yet was there ever a great book without its tedious flats? They would seem to be necessary to procure the proper perpective. Certainly all these whimsicalities of Sterne's manner fall in admirably with the central theme of *Tristram Shandy*, which is nothing else but an exposition of the way in which the blind goddess Chance, whose hobby-horse is this world itself, makes her plaything of the lesser caprices of mankind. "I have been the continual sport of what the world calls Fortune," cries Tristram at the beginning of his narrative, and indeed that deity laid her designs early against our hero, whose troubles date from the very day of conception. "I see it plainly," says Mr. Shandy, in his chapter of Lamentation, when calamity had succeeded calamity—"I see it plainly, that either for my own sins, brother *Toby*, or the sins and follies of the *Shandy* family, Heaven has thought fit to draw forth the heaviest of its artillery against me; and the prosperity of my child is the point upon which the whole force of it is directed to play."—"Such a thing would batter the whole universe about our ears," replies my Uncle Toby, thinking no doubt of the terrible work of the artillery in Flanders. Mr. Shandy was a man of ideas, and Tristram was to be the embodiment of a theory. But alas,—"with all my precautions how was my system turned topside-turvy in the womb with my child!" There is something inimitably droll in this combat between the solemn, pedantic notions

of Mr. Shandy and the blunders of Chance. The interrupted conception of poor Tristram, his unfortunate birth, the crushing of his nose, the grotesque mistake in naming him,—all are scenes in this ludicrous and prolonged warfare. Nor is my Uncle Toby any the less a subject of Fortune's sport. There is, to begin with, a comical inconsistency between the feminine tenderness of his heart and his absorption in the memories of war. His hobby of living through in miniature the campaign of the army in Flanders is one of the kindliest satires on human ambition ever penned. And it was inevitable that my Uncle Toby, with his "most extreme and unparalleled modesty of nature," should in the end have fallen a victim to the designs of a woman like the Widow Wadman. It is, as I have said, this underlying philosophy worked out in every detail of the book which makes of *Tristram Shandy* something more than a mere comedy of manners. It shatters the whole world of convention before our eyes and rebuilds it according to the humour of a mad Yorkshire parson. And all of us at times, I think, may find our pleasure and a lesson of human frailty, too, by entering for a while into the concerns of that Shandean society.

Sterne, on one side of his character, was a sentimentalist. That, and little more than that, we see in his letters and *Journal*. And in a form, subtilised no doubt to a kind of exquisite felicity, that is the essence of his *Sentimental Journey*, as

the name implies. He was indeed the first author to use the word "sentimental" in its modern significance, and for one reason and another this was the trait of his writing that was able, as the French would say, to *faire école*. It flooded English literature with tearful trash like Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, and, in a happier manner, it influenced even Thackeray more than he would have been willing to admit. It is present in *Tristram Shandy*, but only as a milder and half-concealed flavour, subduing the satire of that travesty to the uses of a genial and sympathetic humour.

Probably, however, the imputation of sentimentalism repels fewer readers from Sterne to-day than that of immorality. It is a charge easily flung, and in part deserved. And yet, in all honesty, are we not prone to fall into cant whenever this topic is broached? I was reading in a family edition of Rabelais the other day and came across this sentence in the introduction: "After wading through the worst of Rabelais's work, one needs a thorough bath and a change of raiment, but after Sterne one needs strychnine and iron and a complete change of blood." It does not seem to me that the case with Sterne is quite so bad as that. Rabelais wrote when the human passions were emerging from restraint, and it was part of his humour to paint the lusty youth of the world in colours of grotesque exaggeration. Sterne, coming in an age of conventional man-

ners, pointed slyly to the gross and untamed thoughts that lurked in the minds of men beneath all their stiffened decorum. It was the purpose of his "topside-turvydom," as it was of Rabelais's, to turn the under side of human nature up to the light, and to show how Fortune smiles at the social proprieties; but his instrument was necessarily innuendo instead of boisterous ribaldry, Shandeism in place of Pantagruelism. Deliberately he employed this art of insinuation in such a way as to draw the reader on to look for hidden meanings where none really exists. We are made an unwilling accomplice in his obscenity, and this perhaps, though a legitimate device, is the most objectionable feature of his suggestive style.

One may concede so much and yet dislike such broad accusations of immorality as are sometimes laid against him. I cannot see what harm can come to a mature mind from either Rabelais or Sterne. And if the *pueris reverentia* be taken as the criterion (the effect actually produced on those who are as yet unformed, for good or ill, by the experience of life) I am inclined to think that the really dangerous books are those like the *Venus and Adonis*, which throw the colours of a glowing imagination over what is in itself perfectly natural and wholesome; I am inclined to think that Shakespeare has debauched more immature minds than ever Sterne could do, and that even Pantagruelism is more inflammatory than Shandeism.

So far as morals alone are concerned there is a touch of what may be called inverted cant in this discrimination between the wholesome and the unwholesome. Sir Walter Scott, in his straightforward, manly way, put the matter right once for all: "It cannot be said that the licentious humour of *Tristram Shandy* is of the kind which applies itself to the passions, or is calculated to corrupt society. But it is a sin against taste if allowed to be harmless as to morals." The question with Sterne's writings, as with his life, is not so much one of morality as of taste. And if we admit that he occasionally sinned against these inexorable laws, this does not mean that his book as a whole was ill or foully conceived. He merely erred at times by excess of his method.

The first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were written in 1759, when Sterne was forty-six, and were advertised for sale in London on the first day of the year following. Like many another too original work, it had first to go a-begging for a publisher, but the effect of it on the great world, when once it became known, was prodigious. The author soon followed his book to the city to reap his reward, and the story of his fame in London during his annual visits and of his reception in Paris reads like enchantment. "My Lodging," he writes to his dear Kitty in the first flush of triumph, "is euery hour full of your Great People of the first Rank, who striue who shall most honor me;—euen all the Bishops have

sent their Complim^ts^ to me, & I set out on Monday Morning to pay my Visits to them all. I am to dine w^h^ Lord Chesterfield this Week, &c. &c., and next Sunday L^d^ Rockingham takes me to Court." Nor was his reward confined to the empty plaudits of society. Lord Falconberg presented him with the perpetual curacy of Coxwold, a comfortable charge not twenty miles from Sutton. The "proud priest" Warburton sent him a purse of gold, because (so the story ran, but it may well have been idle slander) he had heard that Sterne contemplated introducing him into a later volume as the tutor of Tristram.

Sterne planned to bring out two successive volumes each year for the remainder of his life, and the number did actually run to nine without getting Tristram much beyond his childhood's misadventures. At different times, also, he published two volumes of *Sermons by Mr. Yorick*, which, in their own way, and considered as moral essays rather than as theological discourses, are worthy of a study in themselves. They are for one thing almost the finest example in English of that style which follows the sinuosities and subtle transitions of the spoken word.

But soon his health, always delicate, began to give way under the strain of reckless living. Long vacations in Paris and the South of France restored his strength temporarily, and at the same time gave him material for the travel scenes in *Tristram Shandy* and for the *Sentimental Journey*.

But that "vile asthma" was never long absent, and there is something pitiable in the quips and jests with which he covers his dread of the spectre that was pursuing him. We have seen how the travail of his broken body wails in the *Journal to Eliza;* and his last letter, written from his lodging in London to his truest and least equivocal friend, was, as Thackeray says, a plea for pity and pardon: "Do, dear Mrs. J[ames], entreat him to come to-morrow, or next day, for perhaps I have not many days, or hours to live—I want to ask a favour of him, if I find myself worse—that I shall beg of you, if in this wrestling I come off conqueror—my spirits are fled—'t is a bad omen—do not weep my dear Lady—your tears are too precious to shed for me—bottle them up, and may the cork never be drawn.—Dearest, kindest, gentlest, and best of women! may health, peace, and happiness prove your handmaids.—If I die, cherish the remembrance of me, and forget the follies which you so often condemn'd—which my heart, not my head, betray'd me into. Should my child, my Lydia want a mother, may I hope you will (if she is left parentless) take her to your bosom?"—I cannot but feel that the man who wrote that note was kind and good at heart, and that through all his wayward tricks and sham sentiment, as through the incoherence of his untrimmed language, there ran a vein of genuine sweetness.

He sent this appeal from Bond Street, on Tues-

day, the 15th of March, 1768. On Friday, the 18th, a party of his roistering friends, nobles and actors and gay livers, were having a grand dinner in a street near by, when some one in the midst of their frolic mentioned that Sterne was lying ill in his chamber. They dispatched a footman to inquire of their old merry-maker, and this is the report that he wrote in later years; it is unique in its terrible simplicity:

About this time, Mr. Sterne, the celebrated author, was taken ill at the silk-bag shop in Old Bond Street. He was sometimes called "Tristram Shandy," and sometime "Yorick"; a very great favourite of the gentlemen's. One day my master had company to dinner, who were speaking about him; the Duke of Roxburgh, the Earl of March, the Earl of Ossory, the Duke of Grafton, Mr. Garrick, Mr. Hume, and Mr. James. "John," said my master, "go and inquire how Mr. Sterne is to-day." I went, returned, and said: I went to Mr. Sterne's lodging; the mistress opened the door; I inquired how he did. She told me to go up to the nurse; I went into the room, and he was just a-dying. I waited ten minutes; but in five he said, "Now it is come!" He put up his hand as if to stop a blow, and died in a minute. The gentlemen were all very sorry, and lamented him very much.

We have seen Corporal Trim in the kitchen dropping his hat as a symbol of man's quick and humiliating collapse, but I think the attitude of poor Yorick himself lying in his hired chamber, with hand upraised to stop the invisible blow, a

work of greater and still more astounding genius. It was devised by the Master of gesture indeed, by him whose puppets move on a wider stage than that of Shandy Hall.

J. HENRY SHORTHOUSE

PROBABLY few people expected a work of more than mediocre interest when they heard that Mrs. Shorthouse was preparing her husband's *Letters and Literary Remains* for the the press.[1] The life of a Birmingham merchant, who in the course of his evenings elaborated one rather mystical novel and then a few paler and abbreviated shadows of it, did not, indeed, promise a great deal, and there is something to make one shudder in the very sound of "literary remains." Nor would it have been reassuring to know that these remains were for the most part short essays and stories read at the social meetings of the Friends' Essay Society of Birmingham. The manuscript records of such a club are not a source to which one would naturally look for exhilarating literature, yet from them, let me say at once, the editor has drawn a volume both interesting and valuable. Mr. Shorthouse contributed to these meetings for some twenty years, from the age of eighteen until he withdrew to concentrate his energies upon *John Inglesant*, and it is worthy of notice that his early

[1] *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of J. H. Shorthouse.* Edited by his wife. In two volumes. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1905.

sketches are, on the whole, better work than the more elaborate essays, such as that on *The Platonism of Wordsworth*, which followed the production of his masterpiece. He was to an extraordinary degree *homo unius libri*, almost of a single thought, and there is a certain freshness in his immature presentation of that idea which was lost after it once received the stamp of definitive expression. Hawthorne, we already knew, furnished the model for his later method, but we feel a pleasant shock, such as always accompanies the perception of some innate consistency, on opening to the very first sentence in his volume of Remains, and finding the master's name: "I have been all my life what Nathaniel Hawthorne calls 'a devoted epicure of my own emotions.'" That, I suppose, was written about 1854, when Hawthorne's first long romance had been published scarcely four years, and shows a remarkable power in the young disciple of finding his literary kinship. Indeed, not the least of his resemblances to Hawthorne is the fact that he seems from the first to have possessed a native sense of style; what other men toil for was theirs by right of birth. In the earliest of these sketches the cadenced rhythms of *John Inglesant* are already present, lacking a little, perhaps, in the perfect assurance that came later, but still unmistakable. And at times—in *The Autumn Walk*, for instance, with its "attempt to find language for nameless sights and voices," in *Sundays at the Seaside*, with their benediction

of outpoured light upon the waters, offering to the beholder as it were the sacrament of beauty, or in the *Recollections of a London Church*,—at times, I say, we seem almost to be reading some lost or discarded chapter of the finished romance. This closing paragraph of the *Recollections*, written apparently when Shorthouse was not much more than a boy—might it not be a memory of King Charles's cavalier himself?—

> Certes, it was very strange that the story of this young girl whom I have never seen, whom I knew so little of, should haunt me thus. Yet for her sake I loved the church and the trees and even the dark and dingy houses round about; and as with the small congregation I listened to the refrain of that sublime litany which sounded forth, word for word, as she had heard it, I thought it all the more divine because I knew so certainly that in her days of trouble and affliction it had supported and comforted her:
>
> > By Thine agony and bloody sweat; by Thy cross and passion; by Thy precious death and burial; by Thy glorious resurrection and ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Ghost, Good Lord deliver us.

And the Life, too, in an unpretentious way, is decidedly more interesting than might have been expected. The narrative is simply told, and the letters are for the most part quiet expositions of the idea that dominated the writer's mind. Here and there comes the gracious record of some day of shimmering lights among the Welsh hills;—"a wonderful vision of sea and great mountains in a

pale white mist trembling into blue," as he writes to Mr. Gosse from Llandudno, and we know we are with the author of *John Inglesant.* Joseph Henry Shorthouse was born in Birmingham on September 9th, 1834. His parents belonged to the Society of Friends, and the boy's first schooling was at the house of a lady who belonged to the same body. He was, however, of an extremely sensitive and timid disposition, and even the excitement of this homelike school affected him deplorably. "I have now," says his wife, "the old copy of Lindley Murray's spelling book which he used there. His mother saw, to her dismay, when she heard him repeat the few small words of his lesson, that his face worked painfully, and his little nervous fingers had worn away the bottom edges of his book, and that he was beginning to stammer." He was immediately taken from school, but the affection of stammering remained with him through life and cut him off from much active intercourse with the world. He acknowledged that without it he would probably never have found time for his studies and productive work, and the eloquence of his pen was due in part to the lameness of his tongue. At a later date he went for a while to Tottenham College, but his real education he got from tutors and still more from his own insatiable love of books.

It appears that all his family associations were of a kind to foster the peculiar talents that were to bring him fame. His father while dressing used

to tell the boy of his travels in Italy, and so imbued him with a love for that wonderful country which he himself was never to see. In after years, when the elder Shorthouse came to read his son's novel, he was surprised and delighted to find the scenes he had described all written out with extraordinary accuracy. Even more beneficial was the influence of his grandmother, Rebecca Shorthouse, and her home at Moseley, where every Thursday young Henry and his four girl cousins, the Southalls, used to foregather and spend the day. One of the cousins has left a record of this garden estate and of these weekly visits which might have been written by Shorthouse himself, so illuminated is it with that subdued radiance which rests upon all his works. I could wish it were permissible to quote at even greater length from these pages, for they are the best possible preparation for an understanding of *John Inglesant:*

> The old house at Moseley . . . was surrounded by a large extent of garden ground and ample lawns. The gardens were on different levels — the upper was the flower garden. No gardener with his dozens of bedding plants molested that fragrant solitude, but there, unhindered, the narcissus multiplied into sheets of bloom, the little yellow rose embodied the summer sunshine, the white roses climbed into the old apple trees, or looked out from the depths of the ivy, and we knew the sweetbriar was there, though we saw it not.
>
> Below, but accessible by stone steps, lay the low garden, surrounded by brick lichen-covered walls, beyond

which rose banks of trees. [The "blue door" in this garden wall is introduced in the *Countess Eve*, and another part of the garden in *Sir Percival.*] On these old walls nectarines, peaches, and apricots ripened in the August sun. In the upper part of this walled garden stretched a winding lawn, made in the shape of a letter S, and surrounded on all sides by laurels. This was a complete seclusion. In the broad light of noon, when the lilacs and laburnums and guelder-roses were full of bees, and each laurel leaf, as if newly burnished, reflected the glorious sunshine, it was a delicious solitude, where we read, or talked, or thought, to our hearts' content. But as night fell, when "the laurels' pattering talk was over," there was a deep solemnity in its dark shadows, and in its stillness and loneliness.

Qualis ab incepto! Are we not in fancy carried straightway to that scene where the boy Inglesant goes back to his first schoolmaster, whom he finds sitting amid his flowers, and who tells him marvellous things concerning the search for the Divine Light? or to that other scene, where he talks with Dr. Henry More in the garden of Oulton, and hears that rare Platonist discourse on the glories of the visible world, saying: "I am in fact '*Incola cœli in terrâ*,' an inhabitant of paradise and heaven upon earth; and I may soberly confess that sometimes, walking abroad after my studies, I have been almost mad with pleasure,—the effect of nature upon my soul having been inexpressibly ravishing, and beyond what I can convey to you." Indeed, not only *John Inglesant*, but all of Mr. Shorthouse's stories could not be better

described than as a writing out at large of the wistful memory of that time when men heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day—and were still not afraid. But we must not pass on without observing the more individual traits of the boy noted down in the record:

That which strikes one most in recalling our intercourse with our cousin at this time is that our conversation did not consist of commonplaces; we talked for hours on literary subjects, or, if persons were under discussion, they were such as had a real interest; the books we were reading were the chief theme. The low garden was generally the scene of these conversations, and it was here we read and talked all through the long summer afternoons. . . . Nathaniel Hawthorne had a perennial charm,—his influence on our cousin was permanent,—and we turned from all other books to Hawthorne's with fresh delight. There is in existence a well-worn copy of the *Twice-Told Tales* that was seldom out of our hands. [It is in the Preface to this book that Hawthorne boasts of being "the obscurest man of letters in America."] . . .

Our cousin was at this and all other times very particular about his dress and appearance; it seemed to us then that he assumed a certain exaggeration with regard to them; we did not understand how consistent it all was with his idea of life. . . .

He was not at all fond of walking, and it is doubtful if he cared for mountain scenery for its own sake. He responded to the moods of Nature with a sensitiveness that was natural to him, but it was her quiet aspects which most affected him. He was a native of "the land where it is always afternoon."

But life was not all play with young Shorthouse. At the age of sixteen his father took him into the chemical works which had been founded by the great-grandfather, and, although his father and later his brother were indulgent to him in many ways, the best of his energies went to this business until within a few years of his death. There is something incongruous, as has been remarked, in the manufacture of vitriol and the writing of mystical novels. In 1857 he married Sarah Scott, whom he had known for a number of years, and the young couple took a house in Edgbaston, the suburb of Birmingham in which they had both grown up and where they continued to live until the end. Mrs. Shorthouse tells of the disposition of his hours. He went regularly to business at nine, came home to dinner in the middle of the day, and returned to town till nearly seven. The evenings, after the first hour of relaxation, were mostly devoted to studying Greek, reading classics and divinity, and the seventeenth-century literature, which had always possessed a peculiar fascination for him. During the years from 1866 to 1876 he was slowly putting together his story of *John Inglesant*, and with the exception of his wife, no one saw the writing, or, indeed, knew that he had a work of any such magnitude on hand. For four years he kept the completed manuscript, which was rejected by one or two publishers, and then, in 1880, he printed an edition of a hundred copies for private distri-

bution. One of these fell into the hands of Mrs. Humphry Ward, and through her the Macmillans became interested in the book, and requested to publish it. No one was more amazed at the reception of the story than was the author himself. He was immediately a man of mark, and the doors of the world were thrown open to him. Other stories followed, beautiful in thought and expression, but too manifestly little more in substance than pale reflections of his one great book; his message needed no repetition. He died in 1903, beloved and honoured by all who knew him, and it is characteristic of the man that during his last years of suffering one or another of the volumes of *John Inglesant* was always at his side, a comfort and a consoling voice to the author as it had been to so many other readers.

Religion was the supreme reality for him as a boy, and as a man nearing the hidden goal. His family were Quakers, but in 1861 he and his wife became members of the Church of England, and it was under the influence of that faith his books were written. Naturally his letters and the record of his life have much to say of religious matters, but in one respect they are disappointing. It would have been interesting to know a little more precisely the nature of his views and the steps by which he passed from one form of belief to the other. That the anxiety attendant on the change cost him heavily and for a while broke down his health, we know, and from his published writings

it is easy to conjecture the underlying cause of the change, but the more human aspect of the struggle he underwent is still left obscure.

Nor is his relation to the three-cornered embroglio within the Church itself anywhere set forth in detail. Almost it would seem as if he dwelt in some charmed corner of the fold into which the reverberations of those terrific words *Broad* and *High* and *Low* penetrated only as a subdued muttering. To supplement this defect I have myself been reading some of the literature of that contest, and among other things a series of able papers on *Le Mouvement Ritualiste dans l'Église Anglicane*, which M. Paul Thureau-Dangin has just published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The impression left on my own mind has been in the highest degree contradictory and exasperating. One labours incessantly to know what all this tumult is about, and I should suppose that no more inveterate and vicious display of parochialism was ever enacted in this world. To pass from these disputes to the religious conflict that was going on in France at the same time is to learn in a striking way the difference between words and ideas; and even our own pet transcendental hubbub in Concord is in comparison with the Oxford debate vast and cosmopolitan in significance. The intrusion of a single idea into that mad logomachy would have been a phenomenon more appalling than the appearance of a naked body in a London drawing-room, and it is

not without its amusing side that one of Newman's associates is said to have dreaded "the preponderance of intellect among the elements of character and as a guide of life" in that perplexed apologist. Ideas are not conspicuous anywhere in English literature, least of all in its religious books, and often one is inclined to extend Bagehot's cynical pleasantry as a cloak for deficiencies here, too: the stupidity of the English is the salvation of their literature as well as of their politics. For it is only fair to add that this ecclesiastical battle, if paltry in abstract thought, was rich in human character and in a certain obstinate perception of the validity of traditional forms; it was at bottom a contest over the position of the Church in the intricate hierarchy of society, and pure religion was the least important factor under consideration.

Two impulses, which were in reality one, were at the origin of the movement. Religion had lagged behind the rest of life in that impetuous awakening of the imagination which had come with the opening of the nineteenth century; it retained all the dryness and lifeless cant of the preceding generation, which had marked about the lowest stage of British formalism. Enthusiasm of any sort was more feared than sin. Perhaps the first widely recognized sign of change was the publication, in 1827, of Keble's *Christian Year*, although the "Advertisement" to that famous book showed no promise of a startling

revolution. "Next to a sound rule of faith," said the author, "there is nothing of so much consequence as a sober standard of feeling in matters of practical religion"; and certainly, to one who reads those peaceful hymns to-day, sobriety seems to have marked them for her own. Yet their effect was undoubtedly to import into the Church and into the contemplation of churchmen something of that enthusiasm, trained now and subdued to authority, which had been the possession of infidels and sectaries.

> What sudden blaze of song
> Spreads o'er the expanse of Heaven?
> In waves of light it thrills along,
> The angelic signal given—
> "Glory to God!" from yonder central fire
> Flows out the echoing lay beyond the starry choir;—

such words men read in the hymn for *Christmas Day*, and they were thrilled to think that the imaginative glow, which for a score of years had burned in the secular poets, was at last impressed into the service of the sanctuary.

Another impulse, more definite in its nature, was the shock of the reform bill. In his *Apologia*, Cardinal Newman, looking back to the early days of the Tractarian Movement, declared that "the vital question was, How were we to keep the Church from being Liberalised?" and in his eyes the sermon preached by Keble, July 14, 1833, on the subject of *National Apostasy*, was the first

sounding of the battle cry. Impelled by the fear of the new democratic tendencies, which threatened to lay hold of the Church and to use it for utilitarian ends, the leaders of the opposition sought to go back beyond the ordinances of the Reformation, and to emphasise the close relation of the present forms of worship with those of the first Christian centuries; against the invasions of the civil government they raised the notion of the Church universal and one. The first of the famous Tracts, dated September 9, 1833, puts the question frankly:

> Should the Government and the Country so far forget their God as to cast off the Church, to deprive it of its temporal honours and substance, *on what* will you rest the claim of respect and attention which you make upon your flocks? Hitherto you have been upheld by your birth, your education, your wealth, your connexions; should these secular advantages cease, on what must Christ's ministers depend?

A layman might reply simply, *On the truth*, and Shorthouse, as we shall see, had such an answer to make, though couched in more circuitous language. But not so the Tract:

> I fear we have neglected the real ground on which our authority is built—OUR APOSTOLICAL DESCENT.

That was the Tractarian, or Oxford, Movement, which united the claims of the imagination with the claims of priestcraft, and by a logical

development led the way to Rome. In the Church at large, the new leaven worked its way slowly and confusedly, but in the end it created a tripartite division, which threatened for a while to bring the whole establishment down in ruins. The first of these, the High Church, is indeed essentially a continuation, and to a certain extent a vulgarisation, of the Oxford Movement. What had been a kind of epicurean vision of holy things, reserved for a few chosen souls, was now made the vehicle of a wide propaganda. The beautiful rites of the ancient worship were a powerful seduction to wean the rich from worldly living and no less a tangible compensation for the poor and outcast. At a later date, under the stress of persecution, the leaders of the party formulated the so-called Six Points on which they made a final stand: (1) The eastward position; (2) the eucharistic vestments; (3) altar candles; (4) water mingled with the wine in the chalice; (5) unleavened bread; (6) incense—without these there was no worship; barely, if at all, salvation. The Low Church was, in large part, a state of pure hostility to these followers of the Scarlet Woman; it was loudly Protestant, confining the virtue of religion to an acceptance of the dogmas of the Reformation, distrusting the symbolical appeal to the imagination, and finding the truth too often in what was merely opposition to Rome. Contrary to both, and despised by both, was the Broad Church, which held the sacraments so lightly

that, with the Dean of Westminster, it joined in communion with Unitarians, and which treated dogma so cavalierly that, with Maurice, it thought a subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles the quickest way to liberty of belief. Yet I cannot see that this boasted freedom did much more than introduce a kind of license in the interpretation of words; it transferred the field of battle from forms to formulæ.

From this unpromising soil (intellectually, for in character it possessed its giants) was to spring the one great religious novel of the English language. I have thought it worth while to recall thus briefly, yet I fear tediously, the chief aspects of the controversy, because only as the result of a profound and, in many respects, violent national upheaval can the force and the inner veracity of *John Inglesant* be comprehended. Mrs. Shorthouse fails to dwell on this point; indeed, it would appear from her record that the noise of the dispute reached her husband only from afar off. Yet during the years of composition he was dwelling in a house at Edgbaston within a stone's throw of the Oratory, where, at that time and to the end of his life, Cardinal Newman resided, having found peace at last in the surrender of his doubts to authority. The thought of that venerable man and of the agony through which he had come must have been often in the novelist's mind. And it was during these same ten years of composition that the forces of Low and High were

lined up against each other like two hostile armies, under the banners of the English Church Union and the Church Association. The activity of this latter body, which was founded in 1865 for the express purpose of "putting down" the heresy of ritualism, may be gathered from the fact that at a single meeting it voted to raise a fund of some $250,000 for the sake of attacking High Church clergymen through the processes of law. Not without reason was it dubbed the Persecution Company limited.

Now it may be possible with some ingenuity of argument—Laud himself had aforetime made such an attempt—to regard the Battle of the Churches as a contest of the reason; in practice its provincialism is due to the fact that it was concerned, not with the truth, but with what men had held to be the truth. That Mr. Shorthouse was able to write a book which is in a way the direct fruit of this conflict, and which still contains so much of the universal aspect of religion, came, I think, from his early Quaker training and from his Greek philosophy. It would be a mistake to suppose that, on entering the Church of England, he closed in his own breast the door to that inner sanctuary of listening silence, the *innocuæ silentia vitæ*, where he had been taught to worship as a child. At the time of the change he could still write to one who was distressed at his decision: "I grant that Friends, at their commencement, held with a strong hand perhaps the

most important truth of this system, the indwelling of the Divine Word." In reality, there was no "perhaps" in Mr. Shorthouse's own adherence to this principle, both before and after his conversion; only he would place a new emphasis on the word "indwelling." The step signified to him, as I read his life, a transition from the religion of the conscience to that of the imagination, from morality to spiritual vision. This voice, which the Quakers heard in their own hearts alone, and which was an admonition to separate themselves from all the false splendours of the world, he now heard from stream and flowering meadow and from the decorum of courtly society, bidding him make beautiful his life, as well as holy. Henceforth he could say that "all history is nothing but the relation of this great effort—the struggle of the divine principle to enter into human life." And in the same letter in which these words occur—an extraordinary epistle to Matthew Arnold, asking him to embody the writer's ideas in an essay—he extends his Quaker inheritance so far as to make it a cloak for humour, a humour, as he says, in "a sense beyond, perhaps, that in which it ever has been understood, but which, it may be, it is reserved to *you* to reveal to men." One would like to have Mr. Arnold's reply to this divagation on *Don Quixote*. Mr. Shorthouse had, characteristically, adapted the book to his own spiritual needs as a representation "of the struggles of the divine

principle to enter into the everyday details of human life."

It was, I say, his unforgotten discipleship to George Fox and to Plato which preserved Mr. Shorthouse from the narrowness of the movement while permitting him to be faithful to the Church. In the Introduction to the Life an ecclesiastical friend distinguishes him from the partisan schools as a "Broad Church Sacramentarian." I confess in general to a strong dislike for these technical phrases, which always savour a little of an evasion of realities, and bear about the same relation to actual human experience as do the pigeonholes of a lawyer's desk; but in this case the words have a useful brevity. They show how he had been able to take the best from all sides of the controversy and to weld these elements into harmony with the philosophy of his inheritance and education. The position of Mr. Shorthouse was akin to that of the Low-Churchmen in his hostility to the Romanising tendencies and his distrust of priestcraft, but he differed from them still more essentially in his recognition of the imagination as equally potent with the moral sense in the upbuilding of character. To the Broad-Churchman he was united chiefly in his abhorrence of dogmatic tests. One of his few published papers (reprinted in the Life) is a plea for *The Agnostic at Church*,—a plea which may still be taken to heart by those troubled doubters who are held aloof by the dogmas of Christianity, yet regret their lonely

isolation from the religious aspirations of the community:

> There is, however, one principle which underlies all church worship with which he [the agnostic] cannot fail to sympathise, with which he cannot fail to be in harmony—the sacramental principle. For this is the great underlying principle of life, by which the commonest and dullest incidents, the most unattractive sights, the crowded streets and unlovely masses of people, become instinct with a delicate purity, a radiant beauty, become the "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." Everything may be a sacrament to the pure in heart. . . . Kneeling in company with his fellows, even if all recollection of a far-away past, with its childhood's faith and fancies, has faded from his mind, it is impossible but that some effect of sympathy, some magic chord and thrill of sweetness, should mollify and refresh his heart, blessing with a sweet humility that consciousness of intellect which, natural and laudable in itself, may perhaps be felt by him at moments to be his greatest snare.

But he separated himself from the Broad Church in making religion a culture of individual holiness rather than a message for the "unlovely masses of people," in caring more for the guidance of the Inner Voice than for the brotherhood of charity or the association of men in good works. In his idea of worship he was near to the High Church, but he differed from that body in ranking sacerdotalism and dissent together as the equal foes of religion. The efficacy of the sacrament came from its historic symbolism and its national

acceptance, and needed not, or scarcely needed, the ministration of the priest. He thus extended the meaning of the word far beyond the narrow range of ecclesiasticism. "This sunshine upon the grass," he wrote, "is a sacrament of remembrance and of love." When, in his early days, Newman visited Hurrell Froude's lovely Devonshire home, there arose in his mind a poignant strife between his loyalty to created and to uncreated beauty. In a stanza composed for a lady's autograph album he gave this expression to his hesitancy:

> There strayed awhile, amid the woods of Dart,
> One who could love them, but who durst not love;
> A vow had bound him ne'er to give his heart
> To streamlet bright, or soft secluded grove.
> 'T was a hard humbling task, onward to move
> His easy-captured eye from each fair spot,
> With unattached and lonely step to rove
> O'er happy meads which soon its print forgot.
> Yet kept he safe his pledge, prizing his pilgrim lot.

No such note is to be found in the letters written by Mr. Shorthouse during his holidays among the Welsh hills; he looked upon the inherited Church as the instrument chosen by many generations of men for their approach to God, but he was not afraid to see the communion service on the ocean waters when the heavenly light poured upon them, even as he saw it at the altar table.

If he differed from the Broad Church mainly in his loyalty to Quaker mysticism, it was Platonism which made the bounds of the High Church too

narrow for his faith. He did not hesitate at one time to say that Plato possessed a truer spiritual insight than St. Paul, and it was in reality a mere extension of the sphere of Platonism when, in what appears to be the last letter he ever wrote (or dictated rather, for his hands were already clasped in those of beneficent Death), he avowed his creed: "That Image after which we were created—the Divine Intellect—must surely be able to respond to the Divine call. The greatest advance which has ever been made was the teaching, originally by Aristotle, of the receptivity of matter. . . . I should be very glad to see this idea of *John Inglesant* worked out by an intelligent critic." Beauty was for him a kind of transfiguration in which the world, in its response to the indwelling Power, was lifted into something no longer worldly, but divine; and he could speak of our existence on this earth as lighted by "the immeasurable glory of the drama of God in which we are actors." It was not that he, like certain poets of the past century, attempted to give to the crude passions of men or the transient pomp of earth a power intrinsically equivalent to the spirit; but he believed that these might be made by faith to become as it were an illusory and transparent veil through which the visionary eye could penetrate to the mystic reality.

For the particular act in this drama, which he was to write out in his religious novel, he went back to the seventeenth century, when, as it

seemed to him, the same problem as that of the nineteenth arose to trouble the hearts of Englishmen, but in nobler and more romantic forms. There was, in fact, a certain note of reality about the earlier struggle of Puritan, Churchman, and Roman Catholic, which was lacking to the quarrel of his own day. John Inglesant is the younger of twin sons born in a family of Catholic sympathies. A Jesuit, Father Hall, who reminds one not a little of Father Holt in *Henry Esmond*, is put in charge of the boy and trains him up to be an intermediary between the Church of England and the Church of Rome. To this end his Mentor keeps his mind in a state of suspense between the faiths, and the inner and real drama of the book is the contest in Inglesant's own mind, after his immediate debt to Rome has been fulfilled, between the two forms of worship.

In part the actual narrative is well conducted. Johnnie's relations to Charles I., and especially his share in that strange adventure when the King was terrified by a vision of the dead Strafford, are told with a good deal of dramatic skill. So, too, his own trial, the murder of his brother by the Italian, his visits to the household of the Ferrars at Little Gidding, and some of the events in Italy —these in themselves are sufficient to make a novel of unusual interest. On the human side, where the emotions are of a dreamy, half-mystical sort, the work is equally successful; in its own kind the love of Inglesant and Mary Collet is

beautiful beyond the common love of man and woman. But the novel fails, it must be acknowledged, in the expression of the more ordinary motives of human activity. Johnnie's ingrained obedience to the Jesuit is one of the mainsprings of the plot, yet there is nothing in the story to make this exaggerated devotion seem natural. In the same way Johnnie's attachment to his worldly brother is unexplained by the author, and sounds fantastic. A considerable portion of the book is taken up with Inglesant's search for his brother's murderer, and here again the vacillating desire of vengeance is a false note which no amount of exposition on the part of the author makes convincing. Mr. Shorthouse's hero burns for revenge one day, and on the next is oblivious of his passion, in a way that simply leaves the reader in a state of bewilderment. Curiously enough, it was one of the incidents in this hide-and-seek portion of the story, found by Mr. Shorthouse in "a well-known guide-book," that actually suggested the novel to him. For my own part, the sustained charm of the language, a style midway, as it were, between that of Thackeray and that of Hawthorne, not quite so negligently graceful as the former nor quite so deliberate as the latter, yet mingling the elements of both in a happy compound — the language alone, I say, would be sufficient to carry me through these inadequately conceived parts of the story. But I can understand, nevertheless, how in the course

of time this feebleness of the purely human motives may gradually deprive the book of readers, for it is the human that abides unchanged, after all, and the divine that alters in form with the passing ages. Hawthorne, in this respect, is better equipped for the future; his novels are not concerned with phases of religion, but with the moral consciousness and the feeling of guilt, which are eternally the same.

And yet it will be a real loss to letters if this nearest approach in English to a religious novel of universal significance should lose its vitality and be forgotten. Almost, but not quite, Mr. Shorthouse has gone below the shifting of forms and formulæ to the instinct that lies buried in the heart of each man, seeking and awaiting the light. I have already referred to those early chapters, the most perfect in the book I think, wherein is told how Johnnie, a grown boy now, visits his childhood's masters and questions them about the Divine Light which he would behold and follow amid the wandering lights of this world. Mr. Shorthouse believed, as he had been taught at his mother's knee, that such a Guide dwelt in the breasts of all men, and that we need only to hearken to its admonition to attain holiness and peace. He thought that it had spoken more clearly to certain of the poets and philosophers of Greece than to any others, and that "the ideal of the Greeks—the godlike and the beautiful in one"—was still the lesson to be practised to-

day. "What we want," he said, "is to apply it to real life. We all understand that art should be religious, but it is more difficult to understand how religion may be an art." And this, as he avows again and again in his letters, was the purpose of his book; "one of many failures to reconcile the artistic with the spiritual aspect of life," he once calls it.

But if, intellectually, the vision of the Divine Light was vouchsafed to Plato more than to any other man, historically it had been presented to the gross, unpurged eyes of the world in the life and death of Jesus. The precision of dogma, even the Bible, meant relatively little to Mr. Shorthouse. "I do not advocate belief in the Bible," he wrote; "I advocate belief in Christ." Somehow, in some way beyond the scope of logic, the idea which Plato had beheld, the divine ideal which all men know and doubt, became a personality that one time, and henceforth the sacraments that recalled the drama of that holy life were the surest means of obtaining the silence of the world through which the Inner Voice speaks and is heard.

To some, of course, this will appear the one flaw in the author's logic—this step from the vague notion of the Platonic ideas dwelling in the world of matter, and shaping it to their own beautiful forms, to the belief in the actual Christian drama as the realisation of the Divine Nature in human life. Yet the step was easy, was almost

necessary, for one who held at the same time the doctrines of the Friends and of Plato; their union might be called the wedding of pure religion and pure philosophy, wherein the more bigoted and inhuman character of the former was surrendered, while to the latter was added the power to touch the universal heart of man. As Mr. Shorthouse held them, and as Inglesant came to view them, the sacraments might be called a memorial of that mystic wedding. They brought to it the historic consciousness and the traditional brotherhood of mankind; they were the symbolism through which men sought to introduce the light into their own lives as a religious art. Now an art is a matter to be perceived and to be felt, whereas a science, as Newman and others held religion to be, is a subject for demonstration and argument. How much religion in England suffered from the attempt to prove what could not be caught in the mesh of logic, and from the endeavour to make words take the place of ideas, we have already seen. You may reason about abstract truth, you cannot reason about a symbolism or a form of worship. The strength of *John Inglesant* lies in its avoidance of rationalism or the appeal to precedent, and in its frank search for the human and the artistic.

It was in this sense that Mr. Shorthouse could speak of his book as above all an attempt "to promote culture at the expense of fanaticism, including the fanaticism of work": but we shall

miss the full meaning of his intention if we omit the corollary of those words, viz.: "to exalt the unpopular doctrine that the end of existence is not the good of one's neighbour, but one's own culture." I do not know, indeed, but this exaltation of the old theory that the chief purpose of religion is the worship and beatitude of the individual soul, in opposition to the humanitarian notions which were even then springing into prominence, is the central theme of the story. Certainly with many readers the scene that remains most deeply impressed in their memory is that which shows Inglesant coming to Serenus de Cressy at the House of the Benedictines in Paris, and, like the young man who came to Jesus, asking what he shall do to make clear the guidance of the Inner Light. There, in those marvellous pages, Cressy points out the divergence of the ways before him: "On the one hand, you have the delights of reason and of intellect, the beauty of that wonderful creation which God made, yet did not keep; the charms of Divine philosophy, and the enticements of the poet's art; on the other side, Jesus." And then as the old man, who had himself turned from the gardens of Oxford to the discipline of a monastery, sees the hesitation of his listener, he breaks forth into this eloquent appeal:

> I put before you your life, with no false colouring, no tampering with the truth. Come with me to Douay; you shall enter our house according to the strictest rule; you

shall engage in no study that is any delight or effort to the intellect; but you shall teach the smallest children in the schools, and visit the poorest people, and perform the duties of the household—and all for Christ. I promise you on the faith of a gentleman and a priest—I promise you, for I have no shade of doubt—that in this path you shall find the satisfaction of the heavenly walk; you shall walk with Jesus day by day, growing ever more and more like to Him; and your path, without the least fall or deviation, shall lead more and more into the light, until you come unto the perfect day; and on your death-bed—the death-bed of a saint—the vision of the smile of God shall sustain you, and Jesus Himself shall meet you at the gates of eternal life.

We are told that every word went straight to Inglesant's conviction, and that no single note jarred upon his taste. He implicitly believed that what the Benedictine offered him he should find. But he also knew that this was not the only way of service—nor even, perhaps, the highest. He turned away from the monastery sadly, but firmly, and continued his search for the light in that direction whither the culture of his own nature led him; he showed—though this neither he nor Mr. Shorthouse, perhaps, would acknowledge—that at the bottom of his heart Plato and not Christ was his master, and that to him practical Christianity was only one of the many historic forms which the so-called Platonic insight assumes among men. To some, no doubt, this attempt to make of religion an art will savour of that peculiar form of hedonism, or bastard Platonism,

which Walter Pater introduced into England, and *John Inglesant* will be classed with *Marius the Epicurean* as a blossom of æsthetic romanticism. There is a certain show of justification in the comparison, and the work of Mr. Shorthouse quite possibly grants too much to the enervating acquiescence in the lovely and the decorous; it lacks a little in virility. But the difference between the two books is still more radical than the likeness. Though absolute truth may not be within the reach of man, nevertheless the life of John Inglesant is a discipline and a growth toward a verity that emanates from acknowledged powers and calls him out of himself. The senses have no validity in themselves. He aims to make an art of religion, not a religion of art; the distinction is deeper than words. The true parentage of the work goes back, in some ways, to Shaftesbury, with whom an interesting parallel might be drawn.

In the end Inglesant returns to England, after years spent in France and Italy among Roman Catholics, and accepts frankly the religious forms of his own land. His character had been strengthened by experience, and in following the higher instincts of his own nature he had attained the assurance and the sanctity of one who has not quailed before a great sacrifice. The last scene in the book, the letter which relates the conversation with Inglesant in the Cathedral Church at Worcester, should be read as a complement to the

earlier chapters which describe his boyish search for what he was not to find save through the lesson of years; the whole book may be regarded as a link between these two presentations of the hero's life. It would require too many words to repeat Inglesant's confession even in outline. "The Church of England," says the writer of the letter, "is no doubt a compromise, and is powerless to exert its discipline. . . . If there be absolute truth revealed, there must be an inspired exponent of it, else from age to age it could not get itself revealed to mankind." And Inglesant replies: "This is the Papist argument, there is only one answer to it—Absolute truth is not revealed. There were certain dangers which Christianity could not, as it would seem, escape. As it brought down the sublimest teaching of Platonism to the humblest understanding, so it was compelled, by this very action, to reduce spiritual and abstract truth to hard and inadequate dogma. As it inculcated a sublime indifference to the things of this life, and a steadfast gaze upon the future, so, by this very means, it encouraged the growth of a wild unreasoning superstition."

It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that those words, taken with the plea which follows, express the finest wisdom struck out of the long and for the most part futile Battle of the Churches; they were the creed of Mr. Shorthouse, as they were the experience of the hero of his book. I would end with that image of life as a sacred game with

which Inglesant himself closed his confession of faith at the Cathedral door:

The ways are dark and foul, and the grey years bring a mysterious future which we cannot see. We are like children, or men in a tennis court, and before our conquest is half won the dim twilight comes and stops the game; nevertheless, let us keep our places, and above all things hold fast by the law of life we feel within. This was the method which Christ followed, and He won the world by placing Himself in harmony with that law of gradual development which the Divine Wisdom has planned. Let us follow in His steps and we shall attain to the ideal life; and, without waiting for our "mortal passage," tread the free and spacious streets of that Jerusalem which is above.

THE QUEST OF A CENTURY

[The scientific part of this essay, indeed the central idea which makes it anything more than a philosophic vagary, is borrowed from an unpublished lecture of my brother, Prof. Louis T. More, who holds the chair of Physics in the University of Cincinnati. If I have printed the paper under my name rather than his, this is because he, as a scientist, might not wish to be held responsible for the general drift of the thought.]

THE story is told of Dante that in one of his peregrinations through Italy he stopped at a certain convent, moved either by the religion of the place or by some other feeling, and was there questioned by the monks concerning what he came to seek. At first the poet did not reply, but stood silently contemplating the columns and arches of the cloister. Again they asked him what he desired; and then slowly turning his head and looking at the friars, he answered, "Peace!" The anecdote is altogether too significant to escape suspicion; yet as *The Divine Comedy* is supposed to contain symbolically the history of the human spirit in its upward growth and striving, so this fable of the divine poet may be held to sum up in a single word the aim and desire of the spirit's endless quest. So clearly is the object of our inner search this

"peace" which Dante is said to have sought, and so close has the spirit come again and again to attaining this goal, that it should seem as if some warring principle within ourselves turned us back ever when the hoped-for consummation was just within reach. As Vaughan says in his quaint way:

> Man is the shuttle, to whose winding quest
> And passage through these looms
> God ordered motion, but ordained no rest.

It is possible, I believe, to view the ceaseless intellectual fluctuations of mankind backward and forward as the varying fortunes of the contest between these two hostile members of our being,—between the deep-lying principle that impels us to seek rest and the principle that drags us back into the region of change and motion and forever forbids us to acquiesce in what is found. And I believe further that the moral disposition of a nation or of an individual may be best characterised by the predominance of the one or the other of these two elements. We may find a people, such as the ancient Hindus, in whom the longing after peace was so intense as to make insignificant every other concern of life, and among whom the aim of saint and philosopher alike was to close the eyes upon the theatre of this world's shifting scenes and to look only upon that changeless vision of

> central peace subsisting at the heart
> Of endless agitation.

The spectacle of division and mutation became to them at last a mere phantasmagoria, like the morning mists that melt away beneath the upspringing day-star.

Again, we may find a race, like the Greeks, in whom the imperturbable stillness of the Orient and the restless activity of the Occident meet together in intimate union and produce that peculiar repose in action, that unity in variety, which we call harmony or beauty and which is the special field of art. But if this harmonious union was a source of the artistic sense among the Greeks, their logicians, like logicians everywhere, were not content until the divergent tendencies were drawn out to the extreme; and nowhere is the conflict between the two principles more vividly displayed than in that battle between the followers of Xenophanes, who sought to adapt the world of change to their haunting desire for peace by denying motion altogether, and the disciples of Heraclitus, who saw only motion and mutation in all things and nowhere rest. "All things flow and nothing abides," said the Ephesian, and looked upon man in the midst of the universe as upon one who stands in the current of a ceaselessly gliding river. The brood of Sophists, carrying this law into human consciousness, disclaimed the possibility of truth altogether; and it is no wonder that Plato, while avoiding the other extreme of motionless pantheism, regarded the sophistic acceptance of this law of universal flux

as the last irreconcilable enemy of philosophy and morality alike. "The war over this point is indeed no trivial matter and many are concerned therein," said he, not without bitterness.

It is, when rightly considered, this same question that lends dramatic unity and human value to the long debate of the mediæval schoolmen. Their dispute may be regarded from more than one point of view,—as a struggle of the reason against the bondage of authority, as an attempt to lay bare the foundation of philosophy, as a contest between science and mysticism; but above all it seems to me a long conflict in words between these two warring members within us. The desire of infinite peace was the impulse, I think, which drove on the realists to that "abyss of pantheism," from the brink of which the vision of most men recoils as from the horror of shoreless vacuity. In this way Erigena, the greatest of realists, spoke of God as that which neither acts nor is acted upon, neither loves nor is loved; and then, as if frightened by these blank words, avowed that God though he does not love is in a way Love itself, defining love as the *finis quietaque statio* of the natural motion of all things that move. On the other hand it was the impulse toward unresting activity which led the nominalists to deny reality to the stationary ideas of genera and species, and to fix the mind upon the shifting combinations of individual objects. In this direction lay the labour of accurate observation and experimental

classification, and it is with prefect justice that Hauréau, the historian of scholastic philosophy, closes his chapter on William of Occam, the last of the schoolmen, with these words: "It is then in truth on this soil so well prepared by the prince of the nominalists that Francis Bacon founded his eternal monument,"—and that monument is the scientific method as we see it developed in the nineteenth century.

The justification of scholastic philosophy, as I understand it, was the hope of finding in the dictates of pure reason an immovable resting-place for the human spirit; the recoil from the abyss of pantheism and absolute quietism was the work of the nominalists who in William of Occam finally won the day; and with him scholastic philosophy brought an end to its own activity. But a greater champion than William was needed to wipe away what seems to the world the cobwebs of mediæval logomachy. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* accomplished what the nominalistic schoolmen failed to achieve: it showed the impossibility of establishing by means of logic the dogma of God or any absolute conception of the universe. Henceforth the real support of metaphysics was taken away, and the study fell more and more into disrepute as the nineteenth century waxed old. Not many men to-day look to the pure reason for aid in attaining the consummation of faith. That consummation, if it be derived at all from external aid, must come henceforth by way of the

imagination and of the moral sense. We say with Kant: "Two things fill the mind with ever-new and increasing admiration and reverence, the oftener and the more persistently they are reflected on: the starry heaven above me, and the moral law within me."

But neither the imagination nor the conscience alone, any more than reason, can create faith. They may prepare the soil for the growth of that perfect flower of joy, but they cannot plant the seed or give the increase; for they, both the imagination and the conscience, are concerned in the end with the light of this life, and faith looks for guidance to a different and rarer illumination. Faith is a power of itself; *fidem rem esse, non scientiam, non opinionem vel imaginationem*, said Zwingle. It is that faculty of the will, mysterious in its source and inexplicable in its operation, which turns the desire of a man away from contemplating the fitful changes of the world toward an ideal, an empty dream it may be, or a shadow, or a mere name, of peace in absolute changelessness. Reason and logic may have no words to express the object of this desire, but experience is rich with the influence of such an aspiration on human character. To the saints it was that peace of God which passeth all understanding; to the mystics it was figured as the raptures of a celestial love, as the yearning for that

Passionless bride, divine Tranquillity.

To the ignorant it was the unquestioning trust in those who seemed to them endowed with a grace beyond their untutored comprehension.

Even if the imagination or the conscience could lift us to this blissful height, they would avail us little to-day; for we have put away the imagination as one of the pleasant but unfruitful playthings of youth, and the conscience in this age of humanitarian pity has become less than ever a sense of man's responsibility to the supermundane powers and more than ever a feeling of brotherhood among men. Of faith, speaking generally, the past century had no recking, for it turned deliberately to observe and study the phenomena of change. We call that time, which is still our own time, the age of reason, but scarcely with justice. The Middle Ages, despite the obscurantism of the Church, had far better claim to that title. One needs but to turn the pages of the doctors, even before the day of Abelard who is supposed first to have been the champion of reason against authority, to see how profound was their conviction that in reason might be discovered a justification of the faith they held. And indeed Abelard is styled the champion of reason because only with him do men begin to perceive the inability of reason to establish faith. Better we should call ours an age of observation, for never before have men given themselves with such complete abandon to observing and recording systematically. By long and intent observation of

the phenomenal world the eye has discovered a seeming order in disorder, the shifting visions of time have assumed a specious regularity which we call law, and the mind has made for itself a home on this earth which to the wise of old seemed but a house of bondage.

> For life is but a dream whose shapes return,
> Some frequently, some seldom, some by night
> And some by day, some night and day: we learn,
> The while all change and many vanish quite,
> In their recurrence with recurrent changes
> A certain seeming order; where this ranges
> We count things real; such is memory's might.

From this wealth of observation and record the modern age, and especially the century just past, has developed two fields of intellectual activity to such an extent as almost to claim the creation of them. Gradually through accumulated observation the nineteenth century came to look on human affairs in a new light; like everything else they were seen to be subject to the Heraclitean ebb and flow; and history was written from a new point of view. We learned to regard eras of the past as subject each to its peculiar passions and ambitions, and this taught us to throw ourselves back into their life with a kind of sympathy never before known. We did not judge them by an immutable code, but by reference to time and place. Nor is this all. Within the small arc of our observation we observed a certain regularity of change similar to the changes due to growth in an individual, and

this we called the law of progress. History was then no longer a mere chronicle of events or, if philosophical, the portrayal and judgment of characters from a fixed point of view; it became at its best the systematic examination of the causes of progress and development. And naturally this attention to change and motion, this historic sense, was extended to every other branch of human interest: in religion it taught Christians to accept the Bible as the history of revelation instead of something complete from the beginning; in literature it taught us to portray the development of character or the influence of environment on character rather than the interplay of fixed passions; in art it created impressionism or the endeavour to reproduce what the individual sees at the moment instead of a rationalised picture; in criticism it introduced what Sainte-Beuve, the master of the movement, sought to write, a history of the human spirit.

But history, like Cronos of old, possessed a strange power of devouring its own offspring. Gradually, from the habit of regarding human affairs in a state of flux and more particularly from the growth of the idea of progress, the past lost its hold over men. It became a matter of curiosity but not of authority, and history as it was understood in Renan's day has in ours almost ceased to be written. Science on the other hand is the observation of phenomena regarded chiefly in the relation of space—for it is correct, I believe,

to assert that the laws of energy may be reduced to this point—and as such is not subject to this devouring act of time. It frankly discards the past and as frankly dwells in the present. It is not my purpose, indeed it would be quite superfluous, to reckon up the immense acquisitions of the scientific method in the past century: they are the theme of schoolboys and savants alike, the pride and wonder of our civilisation. Nor need I dwell on the new philosophy which sprang up from the union of the historic and the scientific sense and still subsists. Not the system of Hegel or Schopenhauer or of any other professor of metaphysics is the true philosophy of the age; these are but echoes of a past civilisation, voices and *præterea nil.* Evolution is the living guide of our thought, assigning to the region of the unknowable the conceptions of unity and perfect rest, and building up its theories on the visible experience of motion and change and development. It has reduced the universal flux of Heraclitus to a scientific system and assimilated it to our inner growth; it has become as essentially a factor of our attitude toward the natural world as Newton's laws of gravitation.

But if our thoughts are directed almost wholly to the sphere of motion, yet this does not mean that the longing after quietude and peace has passed entirely from the mind of man; the thirst of the human heart is too deep for that. Only the world has learned to look for peace in another

direction. In place of that faith which would deny valid reality to changing forms, we have taught ourselves to find a certain order in disorder, which we call law,—whether it be the law of progress or the law of energy,—and on the stability of this law we are willing to stake our desired tranquillity.

In this way, through what may be called the offspring begotten on the historic sense by science, the mind has turned its regard into the future and seemed to discern there a continuation of the same law of progress which it saw working in the past. Hence have arisen the manifold dreams and visions of socialism, altruism, humanitarianism, and all the other isms that would fix the hope of mankind upon some coming perfectibility of human life, and that like Prometheus in the play have implanted blind hopes in the hearts of men. It is indeed one of the most curious instances of the recrudescence of ideas to see the mediæval visions of a city of golden streets and eternal bliss in another existence brought down to the future of this world itself. What to the mystic of that age was to come suddenly, with the twinkling of an eye, when we are changed and have put away mortal things, when the angel of the Apocalypse has sworn that time shall be no longer,—all this, the heavenly city of joy and endless content, is now to be the natural outcome here in this world of causes working in time. The theory is beautiful in itself and might satisfy the hunger of the

heart, even though its main hope concerns only generations to come, were it not for a lingering and fatal suspicion that progress does not involve increased capability of happiness to the individual, and that somehow the race does not move toward content. Physical comfort has perhaps become more widely distributed, but of the placid joy of life the recent years have known singularly little; we need but turn over the pages of the more representative poets and prose writers of the past sixty years to discover how deep is the unrest of our souls. The higher literature has come to be chiefly the "blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realised"; and missing the note of deeper peace we sigh at times even for

A draught of dull complacency.

Alas, those who would find a resting-place for the spirit in the relations of man to man seem not to reckon that the very essence—if such a term may be used of so contingent a nature—that the very essence of this world's life is motion and change and contention, and that Peace spreads her wings in another and purer atmosphere. One might suppose that a single glance into the heart would show how vain are such aspirations, and how utterly dreary and illusory is every conceived ideal of progress and socialism because each and all are based on an inherent contradiction. He who waits for peace until the course of events has become stable is like the silly

peasant by the river side, watching and waiting while the current flows forever and will ever flow.

Not less vain is the hope of those who would find in the laws of science a permanent abiding place—perhaps one should say *was* rather than *is*, for the avowed gospel of science which was to usurp the office of olden-time religious faith is already like the precedent historic sense, itself becoming a thing of the past. Yet the much discussed war between science and religion is none the less real because to-day the din of battle has ceased. It does not depend on criticism of the Mosaic story of creation by the one, nor on hostility to progress offered by the other. These things were only signs of a deeper and more radical difference: religion is the voice of faith uttering in symbols of the imagination its distrust of the world as a scene of deception and unreality, whereas science is the attempt to discover fixed laws in the midst of this very world of change. If to-day the strife between the two seems reconciled, this only means that faith has grown dimmer and that science has learned the futility of its more dogmatic assumptions.[1]

[1] Yet even while I read the proof of this page there lies before me an article in the *Contemporary Review* (July, 1905), in which Sir Oliver Lodge utters the old assumptions of science with childlike simplicity. "I want to urge," he says, "that my advocacy of science and scientific training is not really due to any wish to be able to travel faster or shout further round the earth, or to construct more extensive towns, or to consume more

The very growth of science is in fact a gradual recognition of motion as the basis of phenomena and an increasing comprehension of what may be called the laws of motion. When motion was regarded as simple and regular, it seemed possible to explain phenomena by correspondingly simple and regular laws; but when each primary motion

atmosphere and absorb more rivers, nor even to overcome disease, prolong human life, grow more corn, and cultivate to better advantage the kindly surface of the earth; though all these latter things will be 'added unto us' if we persevere in high aims. But it is none of these things which should be held out as the ultimate object and aim of humanity—the gain derivable from a genuine pursuit of truth of every kind; no, the ultimate aim can be expressed in many ways, but I claim that it is no less than to be able to comprehend what is the length and breadth and depth and height of this mighty universe, including man as part of it, and to know not man and nature alone, but to attain also some incipient comprehension of what the saints speak of as the love of God which passeth knowledge, and so to begin an entrance into the fulness of an existence beside which the joy even of a perfect earthly life is but as the happiness of a summer's day." The sentiment is beautiful, but what shall we say of the logic? To speak of attaining through *science* a comprehension, even an incipient comprehension, of that which passeth *knowledge*, is to fall into that curious confusion of ideas to which the scientifically trained mind is subject when it goes beyond its own field. "Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding." Has Sir Oliver read the Book of Job?

was seen to be the resultant of an infinite series of motions the question became in like manner infinitely complex, or in other words insoluble. But to be clear we must consider the matter more in detail.

From the days of the old Greek Heraclitus, who built up his theory of the world on the axiom of eternal flux and change, the Doctrine of Motion as a distinct enunciation has lingered on in the world well-nigh unnoticed and buried from sight in the bulk of suppositions and guesses that have made up the passing systems of philosophy. Now and then some lonely thinker took up the doctrine, but only to let it drop back into obscurity; until during the great burst of scientific enquiry in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it assumed new significance and began to grow. From that time to this its progress in acceptance as the basis of phenomena may be regarded as a measure of scientific advance.

By a strange fatality Kant, who had been so efficient as an iconoclast in metaphysics, was perhaps with his nebular hypothesis, followed later by the work of Goethe on animal and plant variations, the one most largely responsible for the new hope that in science at last was to be found an answer to the riddle of existence which had baffled the search of pure reason. The achievement of Kant both destructive and constructive is well known, if vaguely understood, by the world at large; but it is not so well known that a contem-

porary of Kant did precisely for science what the sage of Königsberg accomplished in metaphysics. In the very decade in which *The Critique of Pure Reason* saw the light, Lagrange, a scholar of France, published a work which carried the analytic method, or the method of motion, to its farthest limit. In this work, the *Mécanique Analytique*, Lagrange develops an equation from which it can be proved conclusively that to explain any group of phenomena measured by energy an infinite number of hypotheses may be employed. So, for instance, if we establish any one theory which will sufficiently account for the known phenomena of light, such as reflection, refraction, polarisation, etc., there will yet remain an infinite number of other hypotheses equally capable of explaining the same group of phenomena. Or to use the words of Poincaré: "If then we can give one complete mechanical explanation of a phenomenon, there will also be possible an infinite number of others which will account equally well for all the particulars revealed by experiment." That is to say, no *experimentum crucis* can be imagined which will reveal the truth or error of any given theory. This restriction on the finality of our knowledge is borne out in all physical reasoning,—and I venture also to say in the other sciences; thus in optics we can perform no experiment which will establish as finally true the theory that light is caused by the motion of corpuscles of matter

emitted from a luminous body, or that it is due to vibrations propagated through a medium by a wave motion, or that it is generated by certain disturbances in the electrical state of bodies. Each of these hypotheses has its advantages and disadvantages; and in our choice we merely adopt that theory which explains the greater number of phenomena in the simplest way.

If any one should here ask: Granted that from phenomena expressed in terms of energy no ultimate law can be educed, yet may not some other view of phenomena lead to other results? We answer that no other view is possible. Not that the system of the universe, if we may use such an expression, is necessarily constructed on what we call energy, but that our minds can conceive it only in terms of energy. An analysis of the concepts which enter into the idea of energy must make it evident that in our understanding of nature we cannot go beyond this point.

There is an agreement among philosophers and scientists that the concept of space is not derived from external experience, but is inherently intuitive. As stated by Kant:

> The representation of space cannot be borrowed through experience from relations of external phenomena, but, on the contrary, those external phenomena become possible only by means of the representation of space. Space is a necessary representation, *a priori*, forming the very foundation of external intuitions. It is impossible to imagine that there should be no space, though it is possible to imagine space without objects to fill it.

The concept of space therefore makes possible the intuition of external phenomena; but these phenomena to be realised must appeal to one of our senses, and this connecting link between the outer world and our consciousness is the concept which we call time. Quoting again from Kant:

> Time is the formal condition, *a priori*, of all phenomena whatsoever. But, as all representations, whether they have for their objects external things or not, belong by themselves, as determinations of the mind, to our inner state; . . . therefore, if I am able to say, *a priori*, that all external phenomena are in space, I can, according to the principle of the internal sense, make the general assertion that all phenomena, that is, all objects of the senses, are *in time*, and stand necessarily in relations of time.

It follows, then, that our simplest possible expression for phenomena will be in terms of space and time, and that beyond this the human mind cannot go.

Turning here from metaphysical to scientific language, we speak of space and time as the fundamental units from which we deduce the laws of the external world. The fact that space appeals to us only through time furnishes us with our concept or unit of motion, which is the ratio of space to time. The external phenomena so revealed to us we call the manifestations of mass or energy, thus providing ourselves with a second unit. It must be observed, however, that mass or energy is not a new concept, but bears precisely the same relation to motion as Kant's *Ding-an-*

sich bears to space and time: it is the unknowable cause of motion,—or more properly speaking it is the ability residing in an object to change the motion of another object and is measured by the degree of change it can produce. And I say mass or energy, advisedly, for the two are merely different names or different views of the same thing; we cannot conceive of matter without energy or of energy without matter. Our choice between the two depends solely on the simplicity and convenience with which deductions may be made from one or the other. From a physical standpoint the concept energy is rather the simpler, but mathematically our deductions flow more readily from the concept mass.

If then our explanations of phenomena must ultimately involve the two units of motion and of energy or mass, and if it can be demonstrated that on this basis we may account for any group of phenomena in an infinite number of ways, what shall we say but that the attempt to attain any resting-place for the mind in the laws of nature is, and must always be, futile? Further than this, any given law is itself only an approximate explanation of phenomena, and must be continually modified as we add to our experimental knowledge. In all cases a law must be considered valid only within the limits of the sensitiveness of the instruments by which we get our measurements. With more delicate instruments variations will be observed that must be expressed by additional

terms in the formula. Thus we maintain that the law of gravitation is true only within the range of our observation; it does not apply to masses of molecular dimensions. Another formula, the well-known law of the pressure of gases, can be shown by experiment to be merely an approximation, because the variations in it are not of a dimension negligible in comparison with the sensibility of our instruments. As the pressure increases the error in the formular equation becomes constantly greater. To remedy this a second approximation, which is still inadequate, has been added to the equation by Van der Waals; yet greater accuracy will require the addition of other terms; and a complete demonstration would demand an infinite series of approximations.

The meaning of all this is quite plain: there is no reach of the human intellect which can bridge the gap between motion and rest. Our senses are adapted to a world of universal flux which is, so far as we can determine, subject to no absolute law but the law of probabilities. He who attempts to circumscribe the ebb and flow of circumstance within the bounds of our spiritual needs, he who attempts to find peace in any formula of science or in any promise of historic progress, is like one who labours on the old and vain problem of squaring the circle:

> Qual è'l geomètra, che tutto s'affige
> Per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,
> Pensando, quel principio ond' egli indige.

The desire of peace, as the world has known it in past times, signified always a turning away from the flotsam and jetsam of time and an attempt to fix the mind on absolute rest and unity,—the desire of peace has been the aspiration of faith. And because the object of faith cannot be seen by the eyes of the body or expressed in terms of the understanding, a firm grasp of the will has been necessary to keep the desire of the heart from falling back into the visible, tangible things of change and motion. For this reason, when the will is relaxed, doubts spring up and men give themselves wholly to the transient intoxication of the senses. Yet blessed are they that believe and have not seen. It was the peculiar quest of the nineteenth century to discover fixed laws and an unshaken abiding place for the mind in the very kingdom of unrest; we have sought to chain the waves of the sea with the winds.

And how does all this affect one who stands apart, striving in his own small way to live in the serene contemplation of the universe? I cannot doubt that there are some in the world to-day who look back over the long past and watch the toiling of the human race toward peace as a traveller in the Alps may with a telescope follow the mountain-climbers in their slow ascent through the snows of Mont Blanc; or again they watch our labours and painstaking in the valley of the senses and wonder at our grotesque industry; or look upon the striving of men to build a city for the

soul amid the uncertainties of this life, as men look at the play of children who build castles and domes in the sands of the seashore and cry out when the advancing waves wash all their hopes away. I think there are some such men in the world to-day who are absorbed in the fellowship of the wise men of the East, and of the no less wise Plato, with whom they would retort upon the accusing advocates of the present: "Do you think that a spirit full of lofty thoughts, and privileged to contemplate all time and all existence, can possibly attach any great importance to this life?" They live in the world of action, but are not of it. They pass each other at rare intervals on the thoroughfares of life and know each other by a secret sign, and smile to each other and go on their way comforted and in better hope.

THE END.

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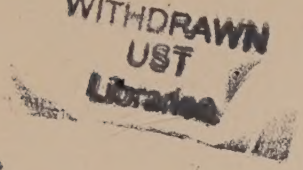

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